



CONFIDENTIAL

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LEP (BLEP) AUDIT AND FINANCE SUB GROUP MEETING

Held Tuesday 5 May 2020 from 2.30pm via Teams

- Present:** Hiren Gandhi (Chair) (HG)
 Lucy Edge (LE)
 Cllr Martin Tett (MT)
- In attendance:** Richard Harrington (RH)
 Ian Barham (IB)
 Fiorella Mugari (FM)
 Sarah Fraser (SF)

MINUTES

ACTION

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Sub Group agreed the Terms of Reference previously circulated noting the BLEP Chief Executive will be included in the quorum should one of HG, LE or MT be unable to attend a future meeting.

It was confirmed investment decisions are currently taken at main LEP Board level but authority may in future be delegated to the Sub Group.

2 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Sub Group noted the outcome of BLEP’s Annual Performance Review and that as a result of the excellent result the LEP would receive its full financial settlement in terms of operational costs for the coming year. It was confirmed all actions arising from the Review had been undertaken or were in hand.

In terms of delivery, the Sub Group were advised work is progressing through the BLEP Capital Programme Sub Group to ensure legitimate defrayal of Local Growth Funds in year, particularly on the Eastern Link Road transport scheme (£10m), which is awaiting final planning consents, and the South East Aylesbury Link Road (£13.5m) retained scheme, to ensure BLEP’s “Excellent” rating on delivery is maintained. Should planning consent not be received by October 2020 on the Eastern Link Road scheme it was reported funds may not be defrayed in year causing significant reputational damage and risk to future funding allocations.

With regards to governance, BLEP has made a significant number of changes in the last year to meet LEP Review requirements, including: incorporating; completing TUPE arrangements for staff; and ensuring appropriate Board balance in terms of gender, diversity and skill sets, etc. With continued work it was anticipated the LEP will achieve an excellent rating for governance in the coming year.

BLEP is strong in terms of its approach to Strategy and achieved a “Pass” at Review. It was anticipated future Reviews may seek to evaluate LEP programme and the impacts achieved, and may, therefore, look to a finer grading rather than the current Pass/Fail.

The Sub Group voiced concerns around the evolving relationship between Government and LEPs and the need for LEPs to maintain their individuality if they are to properly reflect local economic conditions.

3 PEER REVIEW

The Sub Group noted the feedback previously circulated on the Peer Review, a LEP Network initiative, undertaken with Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP.

The LEP Network, who funded the Peer Reviews, are considering feedback received to evaluate whether this is a worthwhile exercise to repeat going forward.

4 AUDIT FEEDBACK

The Sub Group noted the feedback received from the audit undertaken by the then Buckinghamshire County Council in its capacity as BLEP’s accountable body, and the reassurance this provided in terms of the LEP’s operations.

The two actions arising for the LEP from the audit were both being undertaken: to review the assurance framework to bring this in line with the new Sub Group structures and the establishment of the new unitary authority; and to commence a programme to review arrangements for the Local Growth Programme.

The audit also provided actions for the accountable body in relation to the Section 151 Officer relationship with a private company, and the MOU in place between the council and the LEP, and these actions are also in hand. Issues around a LEP staff member (ex Buckinghamshire County Council) with access to the council’s SAP system will be resolved by the end of May.

5 LOCAL ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

The Sub Group endorsed the suggested changes highlighted in the documents previously circulated, which were largely around reflecting the new Sub Group structure in place and the roles and responsibilities of these groups; and would recommend adoption of the same to the LEP main Board on 22 May 2020.

HG/RH

In reviewing membership of the main Board, the Sub Group were keen that this continues to be business (rather than Local Authority or Academia) focussed and led. The Sub Group noted plans in place re future recruitment to the Board to replace members due to step down at the end of their term, and the planned phased approach to Vice Chair/Chair recruitment, the latter requiring someone with significant business and political acumen and influence.

6 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LEP FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The Sub Group discussed the documents previously circulated and noted the level of reserves held in the company which has allowed freedom of operation eg retention of consultants when required, establishment of the Buckinghamshire Business Support Resilience Fund, etc.

Recognising the scale of the task faced by the LEP, it was suggested it would be useful to consider resources in the coming months to ensure the LEP has appropriate breadth and depth of support available. It was suggested the Board may also want to consider investing in a base for the company that could house staff from BLEP, Buckinghamshire Business First Growth Hub, and the Skills Hub under one roof; the aspiration being that this base would be sited on either an Enterprise Zone or in a town centre.

The Sub Group requested:

FM/IB

- Future reports provide clarity on the process by which the LEP estimates the reserves level required.
- Future reports clearly outline: committed capital funding; committed revenue funding; free reserves ie funding that is free to be used in a crisis.
- Future reports provide visibility around the detail of likely gainshare to be received on Broadband contracts. The Sub Group considered the subject of how to deploy this money warranted detailed discussion at main LEP Board level on 22 May, in conjunction with discussion around overall Digital Strategy.
- Future reports provide visibility on any other significant funds eg monies accruing in the Enterprise Zones, likely profitshare associated with the Woodlands development, etc.
- FM circulate the final report once completed prior to sharing with the LEP Board.

7 RISK REGISTER

The Sub Group noted the Risk Register previously circulated and the changes made subsequent to the BLEP Board Awayday held on 23 January 2020.

The Sub Group:

- Requested that where changes in risk rating occur that figures show by how much the risk has increased or decreased.
- Considered the risk register should play a far more prominent role at main LEP Board level; items with a high risk profile being highlighted to the Board.
- Asked for consideration to be given as to how to embed the risk register into the BLEP Board and staff members' working lives.

IB

RH

RH

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing of note.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- To be confirmed