

Open

Title:	Chief Executive's Report
Purpose:	To update Board members on key operational activity undertaken since our February Board Meeting.
Recommendation:	That Board members note the content of this report and comment on any areas of specific interest or concern.

1. Cities & Growth Unit Update

Over the past few weeks, Ian Barham and I have been having weekly catch up meetings with Kevin Hctor and Bethan Hacche from the Cities and Growth Unit Team. In this rapidly evolving landscape, it has been helpful to speak on a regular basis to ensure that information on government support is widely shared across our delivery teams and that the latest insight from the Buckinghamshire business community is shared.

Having now secured a positive outcome from our Annual Performance Review we have been pressing for the early release of LEP Core funding and all Growth Hub funding to support our advanced resilience efforts. It has also been confirmed (see **Appendix 1**) that this financial year 2/3 of our total in year Local Growth Funding will be released in May 2020 rather than the full allocation, and for an area such as Buckinghamshire at the tail end of our programme this represents a potential cash flow risk for later in the year.

2. Annual Delivery Plan & Programme Reporting

One area where there has been a relaxing of reporting measures has been in the submission of the LEP Quarterly Growth Data Returns which has been delayed until August 21st. Our annual delivery plan submission has also been delayed until June.

3. Buckinghamshire Council / Growth Board

The Buckinghamshire Council came into operation on April 1st and already the benefits of a streamlined local government landscape can be seen through a co-ordinated approach to emergency planning, mutual aid and economic recovery planning. The Covid crisis has meant that many officers have yet to directly meet their new colleagues and has also meant that elections planned for May 2020 have been delayed by up to 12 months.

As a result, the member representation for the new council has been retained at 5 but will be reviewed once the elections have taken place. As highlighted elsewhere within this board pack, the MOU in relation to Accountable Body Services provided by the Council is being updated.

4. Growth Hub

The Growth Hub ended the 2019-20 year at the 31st March with the following headlines in terms of performance:



Since 24th March the local Buckinghamshire economy has entered uncharted territory as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and it remains difficult to accurately predict the short, medium or long term impact this crisis will have. There has been a 5-fold increase in the volume of calls to the Growth Hub Business Support Team in the last 7/8 weeks which has clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the Growth Hub as a first point of contact for local businesses.

The team have been able to very quickly mobilise to create a taskforce to deal with the huge number of enquiries which started mid-March. Our most experienced business advisers have been allocated to dealing with more difficult issues raised by businesses and resource has been put in place to collate and update daily all the new business support coming from national government, foundations and trade bodies feeding it through to all staff at the coalface to ensure the most up to date advice is always given. In addition, 6 new members of staff have been incorporated into the team (4 secondees from Buckinghamshire Council & 2 new recruits).

The Growth Hub is working closely with The Federation of Small Businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, the Institute of Directors and local BIDCOs and has promoted all the support available from these organisations as well as that available from National Government and the Growth Hub. In addition the Growth Hub has also made available: -

- Over 400 offers of support which have been made by local professional experts to the Growth Hub and these been accessible by any businesses in distress in Buckinghamshire (collated on the bbf.uk.com/offers website)
- Free webinars (across a broad spectrum of Covid-19 related topics) which are being hosted by local professional experts and are available to available to book via the GH or can be watched via the GH webinar library
- Regular Twitter Q&A which allow local experts to answer business questions directly
- Newsletter articles which have been written to help businesses with frequently asked questions and there is now an extensive bank of FAQs on the Growth Hub website bbf.uk.com/covid-19

The Covid-19 crisis has shown the value of the Growth Hub to local businesses, the Local Authority and the NHS and it has served as a very effective conduit between all three especially

when local businesses have been needed to bolster the supply of critical goods and services to the public sector.

Over 500 businesses have responded to meet immediate and urgent requests from the NHS and other public sector bodies for supplies or services examples of which include:

- The British Honey Company (based in Worminghall, Aylesbury) who have supplied over £500,000 worth of alcohol sanitiser since its end-of-March launch. This has both satisfied a local need and countered the decline in revenues the company had seen in its core product.
- The Cobham Group, which has a site at Marlow, has modified its existing hardware used for oxygen systems in military aircraft to create an air pressure regulator which can be used within a ventilator system to control the flow of oxygen to patients.
- The Global Infusion Group, (Aylesbury and Chesham) usually provides catering at venues, TV studios and event sites all over the world. With theatres, arenas and convention centres closed and concerts, sporting events, festivals, conferences, live performances and filming on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, the company has quickly adapted its operation to deliver catering to the NHS and other keyworkers on the frontline.

The priority for the Growth Hub for 2020-21 will be to support businesses as they plan for recovery which, for some, could mean re-orientating their business and the very fabric of how they operate. The “Build Back Better” opportunities will be unprecedented.

5. Skills Hub

This report provides an update on the work of the Bucks Skills Hub team in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

A key priority has been to provide support to schools. The Careers Leaders (CLs) in schools and Enterprise Adviser volunteers (EAs) are all in different situations at the moment; some may have extra time and be keen to support in additional ways, whilst others may be furloughed and unable to work or may be focusing on critical issues in their school or business. As a result of this some engagement may be lost but hopefully only for a temporary period. The team have considered ways in which they can stay connected to our EAs and CLs and provide the right level of support to meet their needs. It is important we risk assess our network of EAs and CLs in order to support our continuity planning during this period and to ensure we are informed and prepared for any potential loss of EAs or key contacts in schools/colleges. The team are therefore developing, with CEC, a continuity plan spreadsheet to record the impact for our ECs and EAs.

We have shifted our half-termly group meetings with CLs to a Zoom call every two weeks. This has proved to be very popular as the first of these was attended by over 30 participants. We are aware that email communications and offers of support have increased significantly for CLs and we have responded by trying to summarise resources into a simple format. The first of these is a student/parent resource [Isolation Inspiration](#) which has received excellent feedback. We plan to follow this up with a focus on industry sectors and opportunities aligned with the LIS priority sectors. We have a weekly communication to all schools adding local content to the Careers and Enterprise [resources](#). With an awareness that some CLs have been furloughed and those teaching have a steep learning curve, in addition to preparation for a phased return for students (and lack of clarity over who and when) we have been supporting CLs on a bespoke level as required.



The team are planning our third Headteacher event in July to take place on Zoom. If successful in our Hub extension bid (to bring all 37 mainstream schools into the hub), this will be the focus of the event as well a performance review and growth of the network. Our end of March data showed excellent progress in both the hub and the network.

Progress against targets EAN

	Target (Y1)	Target (Y2)	Buckinghamshire	National average
% of currently matched institutions achieving BM5 Encounters with employers and employees	50%	70%	87.8%	63.87%
% of currently matched institutions achieving BM6 Experiences of workplaces	45%	55%	58.54%	54.45%
% of currently matched institutions partially achieving BM6	35%	40%	41.46%	42.79%
Average no. of benchmarks achieved (EAN institutions)			5	3.7

Progress against targets Hub

	Hub1	National	Target 2020
Benchmark one - A stable careers programme	71.4%	49.2%	

Benchmark two - Learning from career and labour market information	90.5%	73.2%	
Benchmark three - Addressing the needs of each pupil	42.9%	30.6%	
Benchmark four - Linking curriculum learning to careers	90.5%	62.3%	
Benchmark five - Encounters with employers and employees	95.2%	75.1%	90%
Benchmark six - Experiences of workplaces	61.9%	65.2%	60%
Benchmark seven - Encounters with further and higher education	61.9%	47.5%	
Benchmark eight - Personal guidance	81.0%	71.9%	
All benchmarks	6.0	4.8	6.0

We have had two successful well attended online meetings since the start of the crisis and some EAs plan to join the CL meeting to extend their knowledge. We continue recruiting EAs and have been carrying our inductions and DBS checks (through new guidance) online. Engagement with EAs has differed depending on their circumstances.

Skills Analysis and Action Plan

Before the Covid-19 pandemic and 'stay at home' measures had been imposed in Buckinghamshire, the Buckinghamshire Skills Analysis and Action Plan was on track:

- the Buckinghamshire Skills Analysis had been completed, setting ten major skills priorities to supply current and forecast in demand skills to the local area.
- the Skills Action Plan was due to be submitted for consultation on 23 March 2020 and contained interventions to respond to the Skills Priorities that built on the existing infrastructure of skills provision or new initiatives in development to maximise local opportunities for Buckinghamshire's priority sectors.

It is well publicised that Covid-19 and associated 'stay at home' measures have disrupted the workforce, having an immediate effect on skills supply and demand. Early calculations undertaken by Buckinghamshire Business First and the Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership reveal that the potential risk to Buckinghamshire could be:

- Up to 77,200 (32%) of Buckinghamshire's workforce being made permanently redundant or furloughed (applying a UK forecast to Buckinghamshire).
- Difficulty working from home or self-employment puts 143,700 of Buckinghamshire's non-critical workers at risk of unemployment and lower earners, younger workers and women are more likely to be affected than other groups.
- New claimants could add 41,500 in Buckinghamshire if the UK's 864% increase in Universal Credit applicants is true for Buckinghamshire, creating a total of 46,940.
- Up to 120,200 (42%) of Buckinghamshire's workforce are critical workers, these roles have quickly increased in demand.

The Department for Education Skills Advisory Panel Programme Team has announced an additional year of funding for our Skills Advisory Panel related skills work. For this, we will:

Refresh both the Buckinghamshire Skills Analysis and Action Plan to accommodate the impact of Covid-19 and associated 'stay at home' measures. The timing of the refresh and adjustments will be aligned to work to update the Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy refresh, a key feature of which is a local Skills Revolution which is needed now more than ever before to recover and restore our local economy.

- i. Quantitative analysis of official data directly from Government and via Emsi
- ii. Qualitative analysis of primary data captured via the Buckinghamshire Business First/ Buckinghamshire LEP's Skills Advisory Panel and network of Sector Advisory Panels
- iii. A review of relevant evidence gathered by the BBF/BLEP stakeholders including Buckinghamshire County Council, industry associations and networks, academic sources, and local/national press and social media.

Produce a Local Skills Report that provides a measure of how the Buckinghamshire Skills Advisory Panel has responded to local demand, what else needs to be done and key challenges/opportunities (work will be carried out to embed an approach at the start of implementing the Skills Action Plan and in collaboration with members of the Skills Advisory Panel).

6. Enterprise Zone

Milestones achieved for each site since the last LEP Board meeting (February 2020) include:-

Silverstone: – Tier 2 Utilities: Main Works Contract financial reconciliation confirmed in March 2020. EZ Funding Outturn Cost was £4.986m (99.9% of £ 4.993m EZ funding allocation);

MEPC Phase 2 Commercial Development: Construction work continuing site despite Covid 19 situation, completion due Q3 2020/21;

MEPC Phase 3 Commercial Development: In April 2020 MEPC submitted a reserved matters planning application for 24,632m² (GIA) employment floorspace. Phase 3 comprises 4 units, 2 of which (2,664m² and 9,100m²) are designed to accommodate the SSIC Swimming Pool and velodrome. Two further units are included (4,470m² and 8,398m²). The target for planning consent is July 2020 with potential construction commencement in Q4 2020/21;

Silverstone Sports Engineering Hub: SSEH submitted an EOI for LGF funding towards provision of a peddling rig (April 2020). The EOI will be progressed by BLEP and if approved the target is for delivery of the project by March 2021.

Westcott: – A41 Access Improvements: Construction Work ongoing with forecast completion in September 2020;

SAC Innovation Centre; Construction ongoing, but at reduced pace due to impact of Covid 19. Revised programme awaited from SAC. Completion should still occur in Q3 2020;

National Space Propulsion Test Facility: Planning application for 445m² building to accommodate Vacuum Test Chamber submitted in February 2020. Target for planning consent is May / June 2020 with construction commencing Q3 2020 and facility fully operational in Q4 20/21;

Westcott DISC; in February 2020 the EZ working with BLEP commissioned a review of the Outline Business Case submitted to government by SAC in August to identify areas to be worked up in further detail to comply with HMT 'Green Book' appraisal route. SAC is revising the Outline Business Case with support from EZ / BLEP to be ready for engagement with Government as a key LIS Recovery project.

Westcott Space Cluster 10 Year Plan: SAC revising 10 Year Plan Vision Document following input from project stakeholders in March 2020. Revised document to be worked up for submission to government for CSR, or as a direct approach to ministers prior to CSR.

Aral / Woodlands: – Woodlands: AVDC planners issued a 'Regulation 22' letter on 6th March 2020, the effect of which is to formally require addition transport modelling work and a related update / addendum to the Woodlands Environmental Statement submitted in support of the planning application in 2017. BA are progressing the necessary work with the objective of obtaining a planning decision by October 2020;

Symmetry Park: Units 2 (5,110m²) and 3 (10,219m²) achieved Practical Completion in February 2020. A change of use planning application for Unit 3 was submitted in support of proposed use as a film production studio in February 2020 with a target determination date of May 2020. Units 2 and 3 are currently being marketed, along with Phase 2 (up to 34,930m² floorspace) – further details via link below: - <https://tritaxsymmetry.com/projects/symmetry-park-aston-clinton/>

During the next period to July 2020 the principal areas of focus for each EZ site will be: -

Silverstone: –

- Progress due diligence on Phase 2 of SSIC (the Swimming Research and Innovation Centre) once a funding decision is confirmed by EIS / Sport England; monitor progress on the Silverstone Phase 3 reserved matters planning application;
- Appraisal of SSEH LGF EOI / Application for the peddling rig
- Prepare CSR funding proposition for the full SSIC

Westcott: –

- Progress the Westcott DISC Outline Business Case so that it is 'oven ready' if funding is made available for projects either via the CSR or other (quicker) routes into government;
- Work with SAC, BLEP, Patrizia and Westcott Stakeholders to progress the 10 Year Vision for the Westcott Space Cluster to set out the broad context and ambition for potentially a £350m overall project at Westcott Space Cluster;

Woodlands –

- Work with BC Highways and Planning on Traffic Modelling and Environmental Statement Review with objective of securing outline planning consent by October 2020;

Key AVEZ Outputs

	(As at end 2019/2020): -	EZ 5 Year Target (To March 2021)
Floorspace Completed:	44,370 m ²	68,900 m ²
Floorspace Under Construction	25,190 m ² .	N/A

New Businesses:	32	64
Jobs Created:	310	1,258
Private Sector Investment:	£47m	N/A
Business Rates Generated	£1.7m.	N/A
AVEZ Project Funding Committed:	£11.5m.	N/A

7. LEP Network

The LEP network under the Chairmanship of Mark Bretton and Mark Livesey has significantly raised its profile over the past few months. It has forged a strong link with the M9 group of Mayoral Combined Authorities, and this has enabled the network to secure places in both national Covid 19 Recovery Taskforces.

The regional grouping of LEP Chairs now meet on a fortnightly basis with ministers Nadhim Zahawi and Simon Clarke to secure direct links within both MHCLG and BEIS, as part of these discussions a number of important issues have been highlighted including the need for LEPs and Growth Hubs to receive additional resources to refresh their economic evidence base and support the Covid 19 response, concerns over the proposed withholding of LGF funding in year and early insight into the devolution white paper which is expected in the Autumn and should include the criteria for the Shared Prosperity Fund.

8. Consultation Responses – MK50 & Freeports

Following consultation with the Chairman I submitted a response to the MK50 Consultation Document which outlined the growth plans for a Milton Keynes City Region. Whilst having no issue with the aspiration of Milton Keynes to become a city region we believe that several the issues highlighted within the report need to be addressed, notably: -

- The drafting perspective is too Milton Keynes centric to represent a genuine city region approach. If this is the aspiration, then a greater collaborative approach will be required.
- The plan is not ambitious enough for Milton Keynes in addressing potential growth locations to the North East and East of the City or in looking at innovation to maximise the previous government spending in Milton Keynes infrastructure.
- The evidence base and growth assumptions need a much more detailed assessment given the COVID 19 impact and lack of reference to Local Industrial Strategies which represents a disconnect with current and future economic growth strategies.

As a LEP we also can comment on the Government Consultation on Freeports. Whilst initially largely focussed on seaports, the fundamental impact on the aviation industry brought about by the Covid crisis means that there may be greater interest in submissions linked to airports and as such the consultation period has been extended until July 13th. Discussions are ongoing with our neighbouring LEPs in Berkshire and Enterprise M3 about proposing a freeport location linked to Heathrow Airport to emphasise the essential role that the airport plays as the national hub airport and in supporting regional economic growth.

9. Heathrow Airport

As highlighted as above one of the most significant businesses impacted by the current Crisis has been Heathrow Airport which has furloughed almost 3,000 staff and laid off over 1000 others due to the rapid reduction in passenger movements. At present the airport is operating from a single runway.

The airport is still processing their appeal against their expansion plans, but whilst the appeal process is underway the funding for the activities of the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group have been significantly reduced. A skeleton staff for HSPG have been retained through continued funding from some member organisations, but I believe that our resources would now be better placed in prioritising bilateral dialogue directly with Heathrow.

10. European Programme

A range of flexibilities have been introduced to mitigate the impact on European Supported projects that are currently in programme and that may not be able to meet their original targets. Whilst this flexibility is welcomed our request for similar flexibilities for schemes that were currently in the appraisal process or have recently been rejected for not fitting into previous priority action targets has been rejected.

On a more positive front we received confirmation that a project extension of £750k for the Low Carbon work programme in Buckinghamshire has been approved.

11. Communications

A number of Buckinghamshire Covid 19 related resilience video case studies are being prepared for the Cabinet Office including for the Global Infusion Group and for a number of businesses from the Visitor Sector.

Work is also progressing on the development of a new website for the Skills Hub to ensure that all skills related content for Buckinghamshire will be available from a single source.

Board members are asked to: Note the content of this report and comment on any areas of specific interest or concern.