
Title:	Chief Executive's Report
Purpose:	To update board members of the main operational updates since the December Board Meeting.
Recommendation(s):	For members to note the content of this report and to approve the BLEP Operational Revenue Budget for 2021/22 and endorse support for an Associated Freeport Submission by Heathrow Airport.
Impact on Risk Register:	The Risk Register for BLEP will be reviewed by the Audit & Finance Sub-Group at its meeting on January 22nd and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

1 Audit & Finance Sub Group

The Annual Performance review for Buckinghamshire LEP is to be held on February 8th. Given the exceptional current economic climate it has been agreed that this year's review will be a lighter touch than in previous years and will only need to feature the Chair alongside the Section 151 Officer and members of the Executive team. The Audit and Finance Committee meeting on January 26th will consider the draft submission documents that were circulated to the Cities and Local Growth Unit Institutional Assurance Team on January 20th. A word version providing background on the submission was shared with all board members earlier this week.

As part of the LEP Network scrutiny arrangements we have been paired with Hertfordshire LEP for this year's LEP review. The two LEPs have much in common including similar economic strengths in the Creative, Health and Space Sectors as well as newly established Growth Boards and shared providers for some of our Growth Hub services. The two Chairs and CEO's met at the beginning of January to help scope out the focus for the review that will take place in the spring.

The Sub Group will also consider the current financial dashboard for the LEP and will review the proposed operational revenue budget for 2021/22, a copy of which is attached as **Appendix 1**. Members are asked to approve the budget which is broadly consistent with financial year 20/21 and incorporating Enterprise Zone income to support an enhanced staffing team with provision for the new Governance and Finance Manager. The Risk Register for the LEP will also be considered by the Sub Group and is attached as **Appendix 2** to this report.

2 Economic Recovery Plan Update

We continue to maintain a detailed analysis of the Covid impact on the Buckinghamshire Economy, with the full evidence base available on the LEP website. [Covid Impact on the Buckinghamshire Economy](#). As we remain in a third wave of a national lockdown it is important that we support businesses to receive Government Funding available from government through Buckinghamshire Council. The BBF Growth Hub have been pivotal in helping ensure that over £20.9m has already been distributed directly to 9,886 businesses since November, making the Buckinghamshire operation one of the smoothest in the country.

As highlighted elsewhere in this board pack one of our immediate priorities for the recovery plan has been in supporting the proposals for the Westcott DISC facility with government Ministers and officials. We are currently arranging for the proposals to be presented to the All-Party Advisory Committee for Space and have been liaising with senior officials in the policy units at Number 10 and the Treasury. As part of this work we are liaising very closely with the Satellite Applications Catapult in promoting the scheme through their networks and making sure that they help position the Westcott proposals as the lynchpin of a national package of investment across the nations and regions.

Another element of the Buckinghamshire Recovery Plan that has received national recognition is the Aviation to Screen Skills programme. We are pleased to report that following a meeting earlier this week between our Chair and some of the other leading figures in the UK Film and Screen industry the Work and Pensions Secretary Mims Davies has approved a plan to extend the Buckinghamshire Pilot into a national programme.

We are delighted to report that Buckinghamshire Council were successful in securing £12.7m funding from the Future High Street Fund for the regeneration of the High Wycombe Town Centre. BLEP endorsed the original funding bid submission and look forward to working alongside the delivery team in implementing the new proposals. At present the team are in discussions with government over which elements of the proposal to take forward from the original £17m funding bid. Once the final scope of approved projects is agreed we would like to invite the team to a board meeting to present on these proposals and the role BLEP can play in supporting delivery.

3 Staff & Board Recruitment Update

I am pleased to report that James Tooley, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Buckingham has agreed to join our board, James will be joining us with immediate effect but will be attending his first board meeting in March. His ground-breaking research on low-cost private education in developing countries has won numerous awards including the Financial Times Private Sector Development Competition.

We have also commenced the process for the recruitment for a new Board Chair, an analysis of the personal qualities and experience needed for the role is being developed and an assessment of potential candidates with clear links to the Buckinghamshire economy is being undertaken to support initial briefings with potential headhunting agencies. We will also be highlighting the forthcoming opportunity within the Cabinet Office Public Appointments Register and the LEP Network.

The recruitment process is underway for a new Governance & Finance Manager for the LEP. Having now opened a new bank account for the LEP and moving to be more independent of the accountancy support of Buckinghamshire Council, the role will lead on all financial aspects of the LEP operation including the preparation of financial reports and programme submissions for Government. The new appointment will also be responsible for ensuring that our governance processes are in line with the National and Local Assurance Frameworks.

Elsewhere on the staffing front we are sorry to report that Jack Douglass, our digital services manager, is moving on to take up a new role with BDUK in Manchester. Over the past 3 years Jack has taken a firm hold of the broadband and digital agenda and helped transform how the

service is being managed. We are lucky that our digital team has able cover in the shape of James Robinson, but given the importance of digital services to the economy I will be looking to recruit a replacement, while expanding scope, as soon as possible to help take forward the strategic management of this service area.

4 Heathrow Freeport Submission

On January 12th Ian Barham attended a meeting called by Heathrow Airport to consider regional support for an associated Freeport submission being made by the Airport. The meeting was also attended by Thames Valley Berkshire and Enterprise M3 LEPs as well as a number of key landowners and business groups including SEGRO and the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce.

As a result of open discussion, it was agreed that exploring the Associated Freeport concept further would be beneficial given that this would reinforce Heathrow's status as the UK Hub allowing connection to other Freeport sites across the country via Heathrow to their international counterparts and align to the Government's levelling up priorities. Collectively, it was agreed in principle that getting behind an Associated Freeport bid would be more beneficially locally, regionally and nationally than a traditional Freeport bid.

The initial submissions are to be made to government by February 5th and in advance of this deadline Heathrow will draft and share a briefing paper with attendees building on the essence of the Associated Freeport idea and what the selling points and benefits are for local customers and stakeholders. Heathrow will also lead on a joint letter with stakeholders becoming signatories as part of the Associated Freeport submission.

Once received we will share this briefing note with Board Members, but we are today seeking support for this proposed partnership approach. If successful such a bid would help elevate the region around the airport as a location for innovation and act as a powerful magnet for international investment and trade.

5 Growth Hub Update

Activity levels remain high for the Growth Hub that is on target to meet or exceed all LEP Growth Hub targets. £6,770,096 has been distributed in grant funding to businesses at the coalface. This grant funding alongside business support programmes delivered by the Growth Hub is projected to create 712 new jobs and 311 new products or services, and despite the pandemic, businesses have themselves invested in their own businesses by providing match funding for their grants of £1,789,219.

Buckinghamshire Business First Performance headlines – 9 mths



	Annual Target 2020-21	YTD Target as at 31 Dec 2020	Actual performance To 31 Dec 2020	Last Years actual performance yr to 31 Mar 2020
Business Assists	20,000	15,000	52,104	34,401 (incl BREXIT effect)
New Jobs	400	267	712	543
New Prod / services	150	112	311	109
Grants Awarded			£6,770,096	£2,145,840
Intensive assist (12hrs+)	300	225	916	411 (incl Brexit effect).
Resource (no. of employees)			53	45

End of EU Transition period A new team has been set up within BBF to provide businesses with support and advice in regard to the end of the EU Transition period. Activity for this team of 7 staff will be reactive but also pro-active with a focus on outbound calls (5,000 target by 31 March 2021) to businesses with specialist advice and 1:1 meetings for those who need it.

The aspiration of this activity is to ensure that businesses are aware of the key implications of leaving the EU in regards to:

- Importing and exporting
- Workforce and People
- Regulations and standards
- Digital and data
- Business legal requirements
- Intellectual Property
- Energy and climate

Community Boards and Start up support BBF and four Buckinghamshire Council Community Boards are working in partnership to deliver a Start-up programme for residents in their geographies (Chepping Wye & Beaconsfield, NW Chiltern, SW Chiltern & High Wycombe). This programme of activity is part of a wider start up programme that has been enhanced as part of the Economic Recovery Plan [Start Up In Bucks](#)

Rural Development Strategy The LEADER programme (delivered through the Growth Hub) has been supporting businesses across Buckinghamshire for the last 5 years with grants to enable diversification, create business growth and increase productivity. This 5 year period of funding is now drawing to a close and with it the end of 2 successive similar periods of funding starting back in approximately 2007. The recent programme has awarded 78 grants totalling £3.6m bringing a combined investment of £8.7m to our area.

A new Buckinghamshire Rural Development Strategy is now being worked on with key stakeholders and will seek to build on the evaluation of the current programme and on the

previous Rural Development Strategy for the area, whilst linking to existing national strategies and policy work, in particular the National Food Strategy, Farming for the Future, The Environment Bill and The Agricultural Bill. The key issues that are relevant to future rural development in the county will be examined and explored against national issues that include climate change, food security, EU Exit and the impact of Covid 19. The first roundtable meeting for key stakeholders took place on 19th January 2021.

6 Skills Hub Update

The Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) met on January 15th to review the draft Local Skills Report that is to be submitted shortly to the Department of Education. The plan is focused around 5 themes and working groups from the SAP reviewed the action plans for each theme as follows:

1. **Future Workforce** Including young people, career seekers and career changers
2. **Skilled and Productive Workforce** Programmes to support employers and the existing workforce
3. **Inclusive Workforce** Cross-cutting themes to support the entire population
4. **An Informed Approach** Maintaining up to date information on skills needs through research and employer networks
5. **A Digitally Proficient Population** Ensuring access to digital programmes for the whole population for work and life

The long-awaited Skills for Jobs White Paper was published on January 21st. Key measures within the White Paper include:

- Business groups, including Chambers of Commerce, working alongside colleges to develop tailored skills plans to meet local training needs; supported by a £65 million Strategic Development Fund to put the plans into action and establish new College Business Centres to drive innovation and enhanced collaboration with employers.
- Giving employers a central role in designing almost all technical courses by 2030, to ensure that the education and training people receive is directly linked to the skills needed for real jobs.
- Boosting the quality and uptake of Higher Technical Qualifications - that provide the skills that many employers say they need and that can lead to higher wages – by introducing newly approved qualifications from September 2022 supported by a government-backed brand and quality mark.
- Changing the law so that from 2025 people can access flexible student finance so they can train and retrain throughout their lives, supported by funding in 21/22 to test ways to boost access to more modular and flexible learning.
- Launching a nationwide recruitment campaign to get more talented individuals to teach in further education and investing in high quality professional development including a new Workforce Industry Exchange Programme

Also announced was the £1.5bn [FE Capital Transformation Fund](#) providing support for future capital investment into college estates.

7 Enterprise Zone Update

Hewdon Consulting were appointed in early January to undertake a review of progress in the first 5 years of Enterprise Zone operation (April 2016 - March 2021), and work on a new 5 Year

Enterprise Zone Implementation Plan (2021-26). During January / February Hewdon will consult with key stakeholders (including BLEP, Buckinghamshire Council, BBF and key Enterprise Zone site owners, developers, and occupiers) to confirm priorities for Enterprise Zone intervention / initiatives in the next five years, building on the Local Industrial Strategy and Economic Recovery Plan to support the recovery and growth of Buckinghamshire. The aim is to finalise the work in March and report to the Enterprise Zone Board in April.

Since the last BLEP Board meeting in December the main milestone achieved in the Enterprise Zone is MEPC's completion of the Silverstone Phase 2 Development, comprising 23,685m² employment floorspace in 13 units. Nine of the units have already been let to a range of engineering, technology and motorsport companies. Some companies are rapidly expanding their operations at Silverstone Park (Lunaz, 3C Test, Delta Motorsport) and others (Digital Manufacturing Centre, PWR and Eighty-One/ Racing Heroes) are new businesses locating into Buckinghamshire.

8 Communications Update

Plans are now being finalised for the BLEP AGM which is scheduled as a virtual event on the morning of March 2nd. The event has been planned to take place ahead of the Budget and a programme of speakers are being lined up for the event including the journalist, broadcaster and political commentator Andrew Pierce and the Chief Executive of the Careers and Enterprise Company John Yarman. The event will also support the launch of our new Skills Hub website.

Board members are asked to:

- i. Note the content of this report.**
- ii. Agree the BLEP Operational Revenue Budget for 2021/22.**
- iii. Endorse the BLEP support for an Associated Freeport Submission by Heathrow Airport.**