
Title:	Chief Executive's Report
Purpose:	To update board members on the main operational updates following the January Board Meeting including the opportunity to comment on the draft implementation plan for the Enterprise Zone Programme and the proposals for the future ownership of the Local Delivery Vehicle Buckinghamshire Advantage
Recommendation(s):	That members note the content of this report and comment on any items of particular interest and concern.
Impact on Risk Register:	The Risk Register for BLEP will be reviewed by the Audit & Finance Sub-Group at its next meeting on 12th May and is attached as Appendix 10 to this report.

1 Buckinghamshire Growth Deal

Departmental discussions have been taking place with officials following the previously reported inception meeting between Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP and Buckinghamshire representatives at the beginning of the year. This includes a monthly meeting with Emran Mian the Director General at MHCLG for Decentralisation and Growth at which I have been participating. The aim of these meetings has been to agree the process by which a deal document is to be developed and to agree priorities on how individual departments can engage. The latest meeting held on the 17th March however provided no further clarity on either process nor priority and was disappointingly non-committal to the concept of a Buckinghamshire multi-year programme. Instead officials proposed focusing on the Spending Review 2020 and Budget 2021 fiscal programmes with a view to continuing a conversation of plugging the gap for those Buckinghamshire priorities that could not be supported by the current programmes. This is in hand however the more fundamental point is the requirement for a reconciliation with first principles established with the Minister over the prospect of a Buckinghamshire Growth Deal.

2 Buckinghamshire Growth Board

The Buckinghamshire Growth Board met on March 10th. The agenda for the meeting included a presentation from the Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group on its future investment strategy and also an update on the Buckinghamshire Vision that we considered at our last board meeting. The Vision will now be shared for wider public consultation following the local elections in May. Attached for information is the latest draft Vision **Appendix 1** document as well as a copy of the feedback **Appendix 2** we provided following our last board meeting. Philippa Batting has now joined the Growth Board.

3 **Oxford to Cambridge Arc**

The development of a sub-regional Spatial Framework for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc was announced by Government on February 18th. Trailed as part of the Government's commitment to supporting sustainable growth in the area, this announcement was accompanied by a series of letters sent to stakeholders by Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP Minister for Housing with responsibilities for the Arc. A copy of this letter is attached as **Appendix 3**. Responses to this letter have now been sent by both the BLEP and Buckinghamshire Council see **Appendix 4 & 5** and the Chair and Vice Chair, in their capacity as business leaders, have both been invited to attend a stakeholder engagement event on March 22nd. I will ask both at our meeting to provide a verbal update on their reflections of the Spatial Framework workshop.

4 **LEP Review**

It has been announced that a review of the future role of Local Enterprise Partnerships is to be undertaken in 2021. The LEP Network is working with government on the proposed Terms of Reference for the review and these are expected imminently. Once received I will share directly with all board members. At this point it is understood that the review has been prompted by ministerial policy decisions relating to recently announced programme funding including the Levelling Up Fund and the Community Renewal Fund. We are also shortly due to engage in a Peer Review with Hertfordshire LEP which is scheduled to take place at the beginning of April.

We have now received official confirmation of a successful outcome to our Annual Performance Review but at the time of writing do not have confirmation of core LEP funding for 2021/22. However I understand from the LEP Network that funding is agreed and will be in line with the current year's allocation. The funding for the Growth Hub has also been confirmed to be £462,000. This is in line with the amount provided for core allocation and Covid top-up funding received by the Growth Hub in-year during 2020/21 but is 60% above previous year allocations which brings much needed revenue support into the business support programme.

5 **Economic Recovery Plan Update**

As the country starts to emerge from lockdown arrangements the focus of the Economic Recovery Plan has been in providing emergency support for business. Buckinghamshire Council have been particularly effective in ensuring that the funding from government gets into the hands of local businesses. To date over £136m of funding has been distributed to businesses which represents over 80% of the total funding allocation to Buckinghamshire and that over 91% of the Additional Restrictions Grant that has been in place since November 2020 has been allocated.

The town centre task force teams are currently preparing to support the safe reopening of the High Street when lockdown restrictions are lifted. Our growth hub will be supporting the promotion of these measures to the Buckinghamshire business community and have also been active in encouraging local businesses to take up the offer of free lateral flow testing for their employees. Elsewhere other notable activity linked to the Economic Recovery Plan has included the launch of the Bucks Skills Hub website www.bucksskillshub.org and the

securing of £1.9m to deliver pilots for demand responsive transport services in the High Wycombe and Aylesbury town centre locations.

6 Enterprise Zone Implementation Plan (2021-2026)

At the December 2020 BLEP Board I advised that consultants were to be appointed to review progress of the EZ over its first 5 operational years and to work with us and key stakeholders to create a new Implementation Plan for the period to 2026. Hewdon Consulting were commissioned in January and have undertaken a range of workshops and conversations with EZ stakeholders to formulate a delivery strategy for the next 5-year period. The direction of travel is shared here for consideration and comment. The EZ Board will work through the detail and finalise the Implementation Plan.

Following consultation with Stakeholders (including BBF, BC and BLEP) the emergent priorities focused on the increase the economic value added by the EZ sites through increasing business productivity and growth and the capture of a greater share of indirect business activity which otherwise leaks away from the Buckinghamshire economy. This means that providing appropriate business and skills support to new and growing businesses in the EZ and environs should be a key objective. Alongside this, a comprehensive Inward Investment Strategy, coordinating with DIT, should also be a significant feature of the next 5 years.

Work to date has also identified range of priorities for the ongoing physical development of the three EZ sites without which they will not reach their full potential. This work may require further investment of the income from retained rates. It includes:

At Silverstone to: -

- support the build out of the remaining 60,000m² EZ floorspace within the EZ designated zone and
- consider the potential to bring forward a further phase of development to the south of the Silverstone Circuit to provide a high-quality employment / R & D campus in Buckinghamshire.

At Westcott to build on the momentum created through delivery of the Space Cluster facilities and to: -

- secure funding and delivery of the full DISC facility in conjunction with the Satellite Applications Catapult, Patrizia and other partners;
- promote the Space Innovation Business Park vision nationally and internationally, aiming to secure major private sector investment in facilities from the space sector.

At Woodlands to: -

- secure the Woodlands planning consent and to promote and deliver the infrastructure and development opportunities within the EZ, and
- broaden the sector base of the EZ to include creative industry opportunities, building on the recent investment in film production facilities at Woodlands by Apple TV.
- Explore the potential for a MedTech campus linked to Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Beyond this high priority work, there is potential for further investment in facilities such as a training/conference/visitor centre at Westcott and/or an innovation centre at Woodlands. These will require a separate business case to justify any investment.

Given the rapid rate of development achieved in the EZ and the potential to accelerate this over the next 5 years I am keen to expand EZ Board membership to strengthen governance arrangements. This expansion would ensure that the EZ Board reflects the public/private sector balance on the BLEP Board through the recruitment of 2 further private sector BLEP Board Members.

7 **REMNUM Update**

The recruitment process is now underway for the LEP Chair with LEP Network Chair Mark Bretton agreeing to support the interview process as part of an interview panel that will also include a number of current Board Members, a copy of the person specification for the Chair's Role is attached as **Appendix 6** to this report.

We were unsuccessful in the first round of recruitment for the Head of Finance & Assurance Role but have since reviewed the job description and are currently re-advertising the role. The new campaign has had a much-improved response and we are hopeful of concluding this process at the beginning of April. Further to this we will also be recruiting for a new Head of Innovation and Digital to replace Jack Douglass. As part of the completion of transition arrangements to the BLEP legal personality, that we created following the last LEP Review, we are also looking to transfer three of our team members currently employed on BBF employment contracts (prior to BLEP incorporation) but paid for by BLEP onto BLEP contracts. This will simplify the arrangements further between the Growth Hub and LEP.

8 **Buckinghamshire Advantage Future Structure.**

Delay in securing planning consent for Woodlands has meant that Aylesbury Vale Advantage Legacy Board (AVALB), which is 100% owned by Buckinghamshire Council, has continued longer than expected. It now has pressing revenue issues to address. AVALB donated its Articles of Association and Memorandum of Understanding to assist the creation of Buckinghamshire Advantage (BA), which is owned by Buckinghamshire Council and BBF on a 80/20% basis, in favour of the former. It was established to be the overseeing delivery vehicle for Buckinghamshire and legally hosts AVALB. BA however has not functioned since inception.

The current arrangements are therefore ripe for review and both Buckinghamshire Council and BBF are open to consider alternative arrangements. Given that Woodlands will be shortly consented and remains an Enterprise Zone and that the BLEP is now a legal personality, which is the main reason why BBF became the BA partner rather than the LEP, I would like to test the Board's appetite for leading a review of AVALB and BA with a view to rationalise the current structures and present a case for a 50/50 joint venture of BA between Buckinghamshire Council and BLEP that may for example become a development promoter on strategic employment sites including those designated Enterprise Zone.

9 **Heathrow Update** – Heathrow Airport were unsuccessful in their application for Associated Freeport Status. The application, which was initiated by Heathrow very late in the bidding process, failed on a number of core criteria including detail regarding the tax status of the

site and greater clarity around the locational boundaries both of which were requested by project partners. The airport feel that they will still have a role to play in supporting the 8 successful applicants across the nations and regions.

We are currently working closely with Thames Valley Berkshire and Enterprise M3 LEP to coordinate engagement with Heathrow to see how we can work collectively to deliver regional growth priorities including an airport centred innovation zone.

- 10 **European Programme Update Programme Review** – We are now at the tail end of the current European Programme but are still looking to secure programme extensions for a number of existing projects in Buckinghamshire to deliver business support services until the end of 2023. With the core funding for Buckinghamshire now fully committed and the Buckinghamshire ESIF Committee not actively engaged in any new project appraisals we would like to take this opportunity to review the impact of the current European investment programme and to consider how a refreshed local funding committee could be more effective in influencing and supporting the delivery of the newly proposed Community Renewal Fund and Shared Prosperity Funds that may follow the pilot and to see how the burden of unnecessary reporting could be lifted from successful applicants.
- 11 The **Risk Register** has been updated following feedback at the last board meeting and following the recent budget announcements and is attached as **Appendix 7** to this report. The continued delay to the Woodlands Planning application and the announcement of a further Review of LEPs has increased the overall risk rating.
- 12 **Communications Update** - A successful virtual AGM event was hosted from Pinewood Studio's on March 2nd the event featured an engaging question and answer session with political commentator Andrew Pierce and a presentation from the Chief Executive of the Careers and Enterprise Company.

Board members are asked to:

- i. **Note the content of this report and comment on any items of particular interest and concern.**