

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP)
BOARD MEETING**

Held Friday 26 March 2021 from 9.45am, via Teams

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair) (Part meeting)
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First (Part meeting)
Adrian Brown, Berkeley Strategic Land Limited
Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills (Part meeting)
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch (Part meeting)
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Martina Porter, Allspring Media
Prof James Tooley, University of Buckingham
Cllr Steve Bowles, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Isobel Darby, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Nick Naylor, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council (Part meeting)

In attendance: Naomi Green, England's Economic Heartland
Kevin Hctor, BEIS/MHCLG Cities and Local Growth Unit
Prof Gavin Brooks, BNU (Skills Advisory Panel Chair)
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Claire Hunter, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnership Director
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- A number of Board members declared an interest in the Getting Building Fund, however, as no decisions were to be made on allocations there was no requirement for these directors to withdraw.
- With regards to the agenda item relating to the Service Level Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding with Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), it was confirmed LEP Board members also holding a seat on the BBF Board would withdraw for these discussions.

2 YEAR END ACCOUNTS

- Board members noted the earlier Board/EGM discussions approving/receiving the accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2020; mandating the Chief Executive to sign these on behalf of the Board, arranging filing thereafter at Companies House.
- With incorporation completed, it was noted reserves currently held by the accountable body will, during the year, move to the LEP's own account. A recommendation on the process to achieve this will be brought to a future LEP Board meeting having been considered by the Audit and Finance Sub Group.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 29 January 2021

- The Minutes of the above meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

3.1 Matters arising:

- 3.1.1** • **Lessons learned – carried forward** – The executive team is collating a full note on 'lessons learned' following work on the latest funding round and will share this once complete.

- 3.1.2 • **Local Growth Fund Programme Evaluation** – A full copy of the evaluation report has been shared and representatives from Hatch will attend the Board meeting scheduled for 21 May 2021.
- 3.1.3 • **Digital Strategy – carried forward** – The finalised Digital strategy will be brought to the Board meeting on 21 May 2021.

4 **SPRING BUDGET 2021 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LEP PROGRAMME**

4.1 LEP Review

- The Board noted announcements made re a further LEP Review, the Terms of Reference for which are still awaited; the findings of the Review to be announced pre summer recess.

4.2 Spring Budget

- Board members noted the report provided, and that Government’s focus appears to be on Levelling Up, Net Zero, and Global Britain (increasing capacity to export).
- Naomi Green shared an update on the transport infrastructure work being undertaken by England’s Economic Heartland (EEH) and the opportunities presenting themselves therein.
- BLEP continues to work closely with Buckinghamshire Council in terms of the response to the Levelling Up Fund to ensure maintenance of the momentum gained through the LEP’s capital programme.
- Board members commented more needs to be done to ensure effective transport strategies at a local, as well as a macro, level; and that digital connectivity is enabled wherever possible as infrastructure construction progresses.

The Board:

- **Requested EEH consider running the planned North/South connectivity study in parallel with the Oxford-Milton Keynes connectivity study, rather than running these sequentially.**
- **Asked EEH to follow up with LEP representatives on discussions around Old Oak Common; and scenario planning being undertaken re prioritising projects within the transport strategy.**
- **Considered a transport strategy to 2050 must consider alternative fuel sources, such as hydrogen and that the LEP must look proactively at how to build supplier chains.**
- **Noted the need to demonstrate where the LEP’s programme supports Government’s agenda and what is needed to provide greater returns, building on Buckinghamshire’s ability to offer economic growth.**

5 **CAPITAL PROGRAMME SUB GROUP UPDATE** (Martin Tett joined the meeting)

5.1 Getting Building Fund (GBF)

- A good response has been received to the open call issued to utilise headroom in the LEP’s GBF allocation. The Board noted the detail on applications received and the RAG rating provided on the suitability of projects to be taken forward for further appraisal.
- The original list of GBF schemes required Ministerial approval; any project changes will require approval, the recommendation being to approach Government with the full “package” of the change requested.

The Board:

- **Delegated authority to the Capital Programme Sub Group to agree, subject to appraisal, the project prioritisation for those bids received through the open call.**
- **Requested an additional Board meeting be arranged, subsequent to the Capital Programme Sub Group, to agree the final package of schemes to put to Government.**

5.2 Local Growth Fund (LGF) Programme Evaluation

- Board members noted the LGF Programme Evaluation report; this being positive in terms of the role played by the LEP in the administration and management of the LGF programme.
- Hatch have been asked for a clearer report on lessons to be learned and areas of best practice that might be developed and shared with the wider LEP network.

- The Board noted uncertainty around future funding streams, that the LEP Review may affect form and function of LEPs, and that this might impact current workstreams to deliver the Local Industrial Strategy. The Board recognised the need to look at how to bring together match funding to support bids to competitive funding streams coming forward.

5.3 Buckinghamshire Recovery and Investment Fund

- Board members noted the first report on the impact on the Bucks economy of BLEP's Recovery and Investment Fund; further reports to be shared at the 12 and 24 month points.
- Board members noted the initial lessons learned in development/management of this fund, the improvements that can be made to similar future programmes, and the significant return on investment in terms of jobs created/safeguarded and new products brought to market.
- A geographical breakdown will be shared for the businesses benefiting through the fund.
- The Growth Hub has reported 420 Buckinghamshire businesses that have closed during the pandemic; research indicating a total of 2,900 businesses in the county being at risk of closure. Those businesses in receipt of support through the Recovery and Investment Fund have reported far greater resilience in the face of the pandemic, Brexit, and future shocks to the economy.

The Board:

- **Agreed to return the slight underspend on the Buckinghamshire Recovery and Investment Fund to LEP reserves, recognising the future need for match funding in competitive bids.**

6 **BBF - BUSINESS PLAN ALIGNMENT/SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT/MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

- Board members endorsed the Business Plan canvass shared bringing alignment to activities of the LEP and the Growth Hub. The LEP Review may bring further changes/greater integration to the work of LEP, BBF, Skills Hub and Local Authority, but this will only be known once the Review has reported.
- The executive team will now produce quarterly milestones by which to measure achievement towards aligned business plan objectives.

6.1 Skills Hub Funding

- Board members noted the Skills Hub budget shared with the Board papers, the ongoing costs involved in management of the Skills Hub, and the unbudgeted exceptional expenditure incurred during 2020/21.
- The Board acknowledged the excellent work of the Skills Hub but, as the outcome of the LEP Review is awaited, were unable to support the request to a multi-year funding agreement for the Skills Hub.

The Board:

- **Requested a paper detailing the full funding required for 2021/22, to include reimbursing exceptional costs incurred in 2020/21 prior to funding being agreed.**

(Andrew Smith, Philippa Batting, Hiren Gandhi and Eman Martin-Vignerte left the meeting)

(Adrian Brown assumed the Chair)

6.2 Buckinghamshire Business First SLA/MOU

- Acknowledging the first class, industry-leading work undertaken by BBF, Board members endorsed the proposal to put in place robust contractual arrangements between LEP/BBF in relation to management of the agendas for the Growth Hub, the Skills Hub and provision of some back office services.

The Board:

- **Asked that legal advice be taken to ensure:**
 - **The correct basis/form of contract between the two organisations.**
 - **The appropriate wording is included.**
 - **Appropriate payment terms are included to ensure consistency with all suppliers.**

- **Agreed to delegate responsibility to the Audit & Finance Sub Group for development, with legal support, of the final, legally-binding agreement between the LEP and BBF, asking that Adrian Brown take on chairmanship of the Sub Group for this particular piece of work.**
- **Asked that the Audit & Finance Sub Group consider the principle of advanced spending and subsequent reimbursement, and whether this is a practice the LEP wishes to endorse.**

(Andrew Smith, Philippa Batting, Hiren Gandhi and Eman Martin-Vignerte rejoined the meeting)

(Andrew Smith resumed as Chair)

7 LOCAL SKILLS REPORT

- An update on production of the Local Skills Report was shared (due for publication on 31 March 2021), prepared in line with DfE requirements.
- The Board commended the work undertaken, noting the efforts made to address some of the challenges posed to young people by the pandemic; that the pandemic may have brought about change in out-commuting levels; and the greater need for training to allow those made redundant by the pandemic to reskill/upskill to take advantage of opportunities being offered.
- The Board urged that independent training providers are actively included in work being done.
- Skills Hub representatives were asked to review announcements in the recent Budget around flexible apprenticeships and the implications/benefits for Buckinghamshire SME businesses.

The Board:

- **Endorsed the Local Skills Report as shared.**
- **Asked for further information around the level of engagement with independent schools.**
- **Suggested support may be available through the Community Renewal Fund to take forward elements of the Skills Hub work.**
- **Asked that the level of employer engagement on the Skills Advisory Panel be reviewed, acknowledging the Creative Sector Group, the Construction Employer Group, the Space Board, and the Health and Social Care Partnership Board all feed into the Panel.**
- **Suggested the Local Skills Report would benefit from an Executive Summary (if only for BLEP Board members), providing the essence of what the Buckinghamshire skills picture looks like, what differentiates Buckinghamshire from other parts of the country, and how skills and training reflect the growth sectors highlighted in the Local Industrial Strategy.**

8 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

- The Board suggested the Chairperson specification would benefit from reference to "inclusivity" (as well as the references already made to diversity), and seek candidates who understand both the opportunities and challenges within the Buckinghamshire economy.
- The Board expressed concern around timing of recruitment to such an important role when the future of LEPs is under discussion through the LEP Review.

9 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Additional date, tbc, to agree Getting Building Fund allocations
- Friday 21 May 2021. 9.30am via Teams