

LEP - Business Support Management Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 27th August 2020 at 10.30am via Zoom

Present

Ann Dean DL

Miranda Barker
Paul Foster
Babs Murphy

Justin Kyriakou
Sue Smith

In Attendance

Andrew Leeming, Boost Programme Manager, Lancashire County Council
Holly Tween, Democratic Services Officer, Lancashire County Council
Andy Walker, Head of Economic Development, Lancashire County Council

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair, Ann Dean, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Stuart Thompson, Paul Evans, Sarah Kemp and Phil Green

2. Declaration of Interests

Babs Murphy, Miranda Barker and Paul Foster all declared an interest in item 6 Peer to Peer Business Support due to the fact the organisations they worked for may apply to participate in the Peer to Peer programme.

Resolved: that the declarations be noted

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2020

Resolved: that the minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

Sue Smith, UCLan, reiterated the Centre for SME Development's offer to play a role in helping analyse or coordinate responses to various surveys

Andy Walker, Head of Service Business Growth, confirmed that the LEP

presentation around successes in Lancashire as a result of European funding was being prepared and would be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

Andrew Leeming, Boost Programme Manager, confirmed that a written piece was being developed through the Access to Finance service around all the options available for businesses, to be circulated soon. Members were asked to share more widely.

Resolved: that the updates be noted.

5. COVID Recovery Grants for the Visitor and Wider Economy

Andy Walker presented the report on the Covid Recovery Grants.

It was noted that Lancashire intended to draw down and distribute £1,544,072 of European Regional Development Fund resources to deliver Recovery Grants. These grants formed part of a national programme to support Small and Medium Size enterprises, with a discrete allocation for those in the Visitor Economy, in adapting to new trading conditions to aid recovery from the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Lancashire had been allocated £400k for the tourism sector and £1.1m for general SMEs, to be allocated in grants typically up to £3000. The initial Expression of Interest phase had opened on Monday. An email had been sent to all those who had registered, which was around 600 businesses so far. A full application should be sent to those eligible during the first week of September. Once successful recipients could evidence defrayal of expenditure, they would receive the funds.

Board members were asked for feedback on the issues their members were experiencing and for ideas around the use of those funds. The following comments were made:

- Some businesses were confused about the terms of these grants and it was suggested that any marketing made it clear that these were not cash grants and could only be spent on particular projects. The website would be checked immediately and it was noted that a list of frequently asked questions was being compiled and would continue to be added to.
- The two chambers represented on the Board offered to promote the grants
- The application process may present a barrier to some businesses. However, it was understood that while the process would be made as simple as possible, European funding still required the necessary level of checks and balances. It was suggested that those who were unsuccessful could be signposted to other available support

Resolved: that officers continue to share detailed progress and contact those who had offered either complementary marketing or direct support to analyse and assess the applications

6. Peer to Peer Business Support - COVID Recovery

Andy Walker presented the report on Peer to Peer Business Support. It was reported that the government has introduced a range of measures aimed at helping businesses to adapt and respond to the many challenges they face, and it was announced in July that a programme of Peer Networks would be rolled out. Lancashire had been allocated £345,000 to deliver 23 Peer Network cohorts, to be delivered by the end of March 2021, after which time the funds would be drawn back to central government. It was proposed that the cost of each cohort would be a maximum of £15,000.

The Head of Business Growth had already sought expressions of interest from local suppliers and to date 26 organisations have shown interest in delivering the support. It was noted that due to the short timescale, only businesses that were already capable of engaging with this work had been approached. A range of expressions of interest from business thematic and sectoral organisations had been received, all of whom can readily identify a cohort of businesses keen to work with them. The aspiration was that each would bring their own strengths to the process and to the immediate needs of the businesses they are working with.

The "play book" from BEIS, which was still awaited, would outline the requirements for the activity and curriculum to be delivered within each cohort. Once this was received, and approval had been given, the team would send out mini procurement packs to the cohorts with the aim to begin as quickly as possible.

Given that following a usual procurement practice to select and award contracts to partners could delay the delivery of this initiative by up to three months, and the short window to deploy these funds, the Growth Hub is seeking approval from the Lancashire County Council Cabinet for an alternate, truncated award process to advance delivery of this initiative.

Some discussion followed about the nature of the cohorts, coaching and meetings and the desire for the meetings to be informal, entrepreneurial and enthusiastic.

Sue Smith, UCLan, offered to arrange sessions on how to facilitate open ended conversations, which was accepted.

Resolved:

- i. That the information be noted
- ii. That the Boost Programme Manager link with Sue Smith regarding sessions on facilitating the Peer to Peer meetings

7. Phoenix Research Project

The Board received a presentation on the Phoenix Research project, outlining the

research package and pathway, outputs and timelines. It was noted that the project had been unsuccessful in its bid for funding, despite being given very positive feedback, as it was deemed to be not national enough. Sue Smith and colleagues at UCLan planned to continue the project but could only continue on a skeletal basis without some form of funding support. The aspiration for the project was to inform policy and practice.

Discussion followed the presentation.

Due to comments that many businesses were fatigued with completing surveys at the current time, it was proposed that Sue Smith link with Babs Murphy and Miranda Barker at the Chamber of Commerce to consider the Quarterly Economic Survey data and add some supplementary questions to the next survey to inform the Phoenix project.

Andy Walker offered to mention it to the group of three NP11 Growth Hubs he was a member of to gauge interest.

Sue was thanked for her presentation.

Resolved:

- i. That the presentation be noted
- ii. That Sue Smith link with the members of the Chambers of Commerce to consider the Quarterly Economic Survey data and potential to add supplementary questions
- iii. That Andy Walker raise it as an item of interest to the NP11 Growth Hub group

8. Wider LEP Update

It was reported that work was ongoing in the sectoral groups set up through the LEP, and the wider business support offer was beginning to feed into these groups. The Innovation Board had recently held its first meeting.

There had been a recent call for oven ready projects from the government. Lancashire had been successful and around 12 projects had been funded.

The Local Industrial Strategy was underway again, having been paused by covid, and would be shared as it progressed.

It was commented that much of the business community was unaware of the work of the LEP and may benefit from regular updates on LEP activity. It was agreed to provide a version of the weekly newsletter for wider circulation.

Resolved: that a weekly newsletter be circulated to the wider business community

9. Any Other Business

Members were invited to share feedback from their organisations.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 10.30am on 27 August 2020. Venue/virtual details to follow.