

LEP - Business Support Management Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday, 10th February, 2022 at 10.30 am at the Savoy Suite 2 - The Exchange - County Hall, Preston

Present

Ann Dean MBE DL (Chair)

Miranda Barker
Paul Foster
Justin Kyriakou

Sue Smith
Liz Tapner

In Attendance

Sarah Kemp, CEO Lancashire Enterprise Partnership
Andrew Leeming, Boost Programme Manager, Lancashire County Council
Andy Walker, Head of Economic Development, Lancashire County Council
Lynne Gillen, Export Manager for the Department of International Trade North West
Andy Milroy, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Lancashire County Council
Garth Harbison, Democratic Services Officer, Lancashire County Council

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

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

The Chair welcomed Lynne Gillen, Export Manager for the Department of International Trade North West, to the meeting

Apologies were received from Geoff Mason, Frank McKenna, Stuart Thompson and Damian Waters.

2. Declaration of Interests

None were declared.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2021

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting on the 20 May 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

5. Business Support Update and Future Scoping

Andy Walker, Head of Service Business Growth, presented the report providing a brief update on a range of new locally funded business support provision for 2022. These initiatives added to the existing network of publicly funded business support provision in Lancashire but had specifically been created to provide on-going support to sectors badly impacted by the pandemic or to boost the speed at which the economy recovered.

In addition the report set out some key national policy announcements through the year which would potentially influence the shape and funding for growth Hubs moving forward.

The Board was informed that there had been recent announcements on the Levelling Up White Paper and the Government was now showing some of the potential areas for future funding.

It was important for this Board to look at the future of business support. A procurement exercise had been carried out at the end of 2021 to select delivery partners and most contracts had been signed. Procurement had been strong on the onus of relationship management. Within all the contracts there had been an expectation that the services providers kept in touch with all the businesses on a regular basis.

In terms of the Overview and Scrutiny role of the Business Support Management Board it was reported that at Boost 3, which was the three years that ended at Christmas 2021, all targets had been hit in terms of both the draw down of BEIS monies and European Regional Development Fund monies, and there had been clean audits all the way through.

One of the things that had been done that was closely aligned to Boost was to provide match funding for the Access to Finance Service. This was a very well used service in Lancashire and the provision was being strengthened moving forward.

It was important to communicate with businesses and get them to embrace the Net Zero strategy and low carbon. The important question was how to get small businesses to buy in and be supported in terms of low carbon. The short term thinking of small businesses must be changed. It was noted that the supply of pressure on some larger firms had been overlooked in terms of reducing the carbon footprint.

Resolved: The Business Support Management Board noted the report as a prompt to considering a wider process to determine local business support priorities moving forward.

6. Peer Networks Update

The report presented explained that in September 2022, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) provided additional support through the English Growth Hub network to organise Peer to Peer business groups, as a practical support mechanism addressing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Boost – Lancashire's Business Growth Hub quickly responded to commission a range of organisations to facilitate these groups. This allowed groups in the same sector, with the same profile of ownership or aligned to existing business organisations to start meeting and help one another.

Following two further cohorts of Peer 2 Peer provision, BEIS had now announced that this earmarked funding would end in March 2020.

The report considered the impact that this programme had had in Lancashire and whether alternate resource should be sought to continue a similar programme as the configuration of new funding regimes became clear.

It was felt that Peer to Peer was something that had really worked well and had heritage within the Lancashire Business Support System given the work that Lancaster University had done with the then development agencies.

It was announced to the Board that the Levelling Up White Paper had just been received. It explained the role of enterprise partnerships in terms of devolution.

The more immediate impact were the signals around the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which was the replacement for European monies which the north of England had used particularly well over the last few decades. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund would be allocated at a district and unitary authority level. There would now be effectively 14 separate programmes running across Lancashire.

It was stated that Peer to Peer sat comfortably within the private sector. A working group was suggested for quick if the Board felt there was value in retaining this concept.

It was stated that over the next 18 months the Board needed to have a more comprehensive view of the desired business support offer in Lancashire.

Resolved: That;

1. The Business Support Management Board note the report presented.
2. The Peer Networks item comes to future Business Support Management Board meetings.

7. Export / International Trade Support

The Chair welcomed Lynne Gillen, Export Manager for the Department of

International Trade North West, to the meeting.

Lynne informed the Board that she had been seconded to the LEP and was working with LCC officers on an internalisation strategy and export plan. It was important to get new exports in the region as well as existing exporters to export more. An export plan for Lancashire was being developed.

Suggested activity from the Internationalisation Strategy were:

- Digital Services
- Promotion and Branding
- Collaboration on Markets and Sectors
- International Networks and Sectors
- Sustainability

One of the difficult things to map were the capabilities of the region. It was vital to localise support for businesses and to upskill the regions exporters. It was important to promote Lancashire in international markets, develop trade corridors and have a collaborative calendar of events.

The Department for International Trade had launched its Internationalisation Fund for eligible businesses in England. The fund was designed to support businesses looking to grow their international trade. SMEs could apply for match-funded grants of between £1,000 and £9,000 which would be available for proposed future activities, subject to eligibility. Funding was subject to availability and would be prioritised for businesses who could demonstrate they have high export potential.

The Board was informed that there were 12 export champions in Lancashire who did a lot of pro bono work with many of the clients that the Department of International Trade North West worked with.

It was noted that exports could be increased massively by looking at the UK supply chain.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

8. Wider LEP Update

In terms of digesting the Levelling Up White Paper, clearly Lancashire was in a position where it was not in the first nine areas to move forward for a county deal but it was very much in the thinking of the local authority leaders within Lancashire to progress that process.

In terms of developing that proposition and a vision for Lancashire moving forward to 2050 there were a series of papers making their way through all of the full councils across Lancashire. That paper had been endorsed and the vast majority of the response had been very strong and positive.

Regarding devolution, the Levelling Up White Paper set out which areas would

get powers and was specific about the rewards and incentives that went along with these powers.

The preferred alternative that came out of the Levelling Up White Paper was for mayoral combined authorities. It was not clear yet what the political response to this would be within Lancashire. Lancashire had been looking for a settlement which had less change in terms of local arrangements around local government.

In terms of the White Paper it was noted that this was the first time that LEPs had been written into Government policy, which was significant.

What ministers had stated was that they wanted to continue with the devolution journey. There was only 40% of the country covered by devolution. They preferred the model of a combined authority with an integrated LEP within that model. They also stated that Lancashire must its services and business voice into the UK's new devolution plans and be at the table to discuss these negotiations.

Lancashire was waiting for the minister to write to it spelling out what the future functions of LEPs would be and what the financial settlements were going to be.

Resolved: The Business Support Management Board noted the update.

9. Reporting to Lancashire Enterprise Partnership Board

Resolved: There were no items to be reported to the LEP Board.

10. Any Other Business

Sue Smith updated the Board on research being done by UCLAN on the impact of Covid on Lancashire SMEs. This had been fed into various parliamentary select committees and a number of European partners. The impact of Covid would be revisited in March 2022 and SMEs would be presented with a survey about this. There was a request for Board members to support the follow up survey, possibly through social media. This was welcomed by the Board

Sue also requested if the Board would like her to come back nearer the time of the Shared Prosperity Fund to present on feeding into the future of business support. This was also welcomed by the Board.

11. Date of Next Meeting and Programme of Meetings for 2022/23

Resolved:

1. The Board noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 26 May 2022, at 10:30am, and would be held as a Hybrid meeting (County Hall / Teams)
2. It was agreed to moving the Board meetings currently scheduled for

August and October meetings in 2022 to September and November 2022 respectively. Dates to be confirmed.

3. It was noted that the meeting scheduled for Thursday 9 February 2023 would take place at 10:30am as a Hybrid meeting (County Hall / Teams).