

LEP - Business Support Management Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday, 8th September, 2022 at 10.30 am at the Committee Room 'B' - The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston

Present

Ann Dean MBE DL

Miranda Barker OBE
Paul Foster
Martyn Jones

Justin Kyriakou
Liz Tapner
Stuart Thompson

In Attendance

Andy Walker, Acting Director - Growth, Environment and Planning, Lancashire County Council and LEP CEO
Andrew Leeming, Boost Programme Manager, Lancashire County Council
Holly Tween, Democratic Services Officer, Lancashire County Council
Amin Vepari, Senior Project Officer Strategic Development, Lancashire County Council
Philip Hargreaves, Head of Access to Finance

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. No apologies had been received.

2. Declaration of Interests

None

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022

Resolved: the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising

Regarding Export activities, it was noted that the internationalisation grant is still available in Lancashire, worth up to £9,000 towards trade show visits as well as preparatory research into new export territories. It was also noted that the Chamber of Commerce were developing support around this grant in areas taking up the UK Shared Prosperity Funding.

Regarding the Peer Network, it was noted that the funding had ceased, as had

the peer-to-peer learning cohorts, but evidence suggested the peer networks had been successful regarding connectivity of the cohorts of businesses engaged in it. The team were now considering how to apply the lessons learned to the future position of business support delivery.

It was noted under item 5 that Downtown In Business had planned to set up a group for Women; the Women's Enterprise steering group was taking place next week. It was further reported that the women's Scaling Up programme was beginning next month with a cohort of 14.

Under item 6 it was confirmed that the final draft of the Availability of Finance in Lancashire report was underway, and the Committee's comment about the lack of investment plan for social enterprises had been taken into account.

Under item 7 it was noted that a letter had been sent to the Secretary of State on behalf of Lancashire businesses, but no reply had yet been received. It was agreed that a further letter could be sent to the new Secretary once the local position with the Shared Prosperity Fund was clearer.

Resolved: that a further letter be sent to the new Secretary of State once the local position with the Shared Prosperity Fund was clearer

5. Sourcing Grants for Early Stage Businesses

The Chair commented on the changing shape of grants provision to entrepreneurs, including via competitions and private equity packages, and invited the Committee to consider how to ensure there was innovative provision across Lancashire.

Amin Vepari, Senior Project Officer Business Growth, updated the Committee on the recent creation of a Funding Hub for Lancashire, which would be utilised as a central portal for loans and equity, but also for grants. It would be housed on the Boost website and would link into different types of grants such as internationalisation grants and innovation grants, and potentially the grant initiatives within a number of the local authorities' Shared Prosperity Fund proposals.

It was commented that receiving a grant at the right moment of a business's development could significantly accelerate their development and job generation. It was also noted that the innovation-based competition run last year in the Innovation Space had attracted a different group of businesses than those typically accessing that space, and that therefore grants as prizes should not be discounted as a way of incentivising and detecting new talent. It was also commented that ensuring there was a strong supportive infrastructure in place, and a real potential to develop after the first intervention was also critical to ensure the best use of grant funding.

The RedCAT project was referenced as a good case study to show the pathway from initial assessment to grant award and business support to growth and job

creation. It was suggested this could be considered in more detail at a future meeting and that a template could be developed.

A question was asked about the business incubator attached to the UCLan Centre for SME and Enterprise Development. It was noted that this was not a fund as such, but gave access to mentoring support, leadership and management development and practical advice.

Philip Hargreaves, Head of Access to Finance, was introduced and gave a presentation on the work of Access to Finance, the current landscape and its opportunities and challenges, and plans for the future, followed by questions and discussion.

Resolved: the Business Support Management Board agreed that:

- i. the presentation and discussion be noted
- ii. Miranda Barker be invited to discuss the RedCAT project at the next meeting as a case study for successful business support and grant funding
- iii. A standing agenda item be added to all future meetings on the position of Lancashire businesses, to be a round table update and discussion
- iv. A representative from the British Business Bank be invited to the next meeting to give a view on the finance market and current banking offers to businesses

6. UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Miranda Barker OBE led a discussion on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

At this point, Miranda Barker OBE, Liz Tapner and Ann Dean MBE DL declared a non pecuniary interest in the discussion. However, as no decisions were to be made and the discussion was general and not relating to specific projects, no action was required.

It was noted that for many years the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) had funded business support such as scale ups, start ups, social enterprise, international trade, and that access to this was equal across all parts of Lancashire. With the end of the European Structural Funding, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has now come in, intended as the funding source to replace the European funding. It was commented that in areas with a Combined Authority this could work well; however, in Lancashire the money had instead been allocated to the lowest organisational governmental body in each area, which was the two unitary authorities and 12 districts, each of whom were required to put forward acceptable investment plans for the funding.

There was concern that in some areas there may be no plans to fund business support or skills support, and that this would create a post code lottery for businesses.

It was reported that the general thematic responses from the districts and unitary authorities had shown where they had an interest and would potentially invest, and investment plans had been submitted at the end of August. Some had specified their chosen delivery partners where they planned to partake in pan-Lancashire projects, and some had not. There was some concern over the lengthy procurement processes required, and the uncertainty as a result.

It was noted that several areas had included Boost in their investment plan, but it was not clear what would be the final amount committed to Boost over the next 2½ years, which currently ran at roughly £1.5-2 million per year.

Resolved: that the update be noted

7. Update on Boost

Andrew Leeming, Boost Programme Manager, gave an update on the current position of Boost.

Most of the authorities across Lancashire had supported the principle of some sort of business support continuity across all of Lancashire. Conversations were ongoing to consider how to create a pan-Lancashire narrative that would avoid a postcode lottery scenario. However, it was noted that the Shared Prosperity Fund had created a narrative where the more each authority put in the more support their area could receive and there was a concern that talent may be lost.

The challenge would then be considering how to translate that into a plan and put out to procurement the services Boost would like to offer to businesses, recognising that doing things centrally would allow Lancashire to benefit from economies of scale.

There were ongoing conversations within the growth hub cluster about how to communicate to BEIS the need for stronger leadership around what was expected, and the sort of resource which will be made available to growth hubs.

A decision from government on whether the local authorities' applications for their allocation of the Shared Prosperity Fund was successful was expected around October.

Resolved: that the update be noted

8. Wider LEP Update

Andy Walker reported that he has now taken the role of Chief Executive of the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and gave an update.

With the new Cabinet now announced, the LEP was waiting to hear about their attitude towards LEPs as a policy and as part of the levelling up agenda and a

means of making investments into regions of England, and also the extent of core grant and remit given to LEPs. The budget ran to the end of 2022-23 and, as well as setting out the financial position, the LEP would also be considering the investment policy around the Growing Places Fund, which could still be accessed.

The LEP Board had a turnover of Board members and would therefore be considering sectors where representation was needed to fill those vacancies.

Resolved: that the update be noted

9. Reporting to Lancashire Enterprise Partnership Board

Resolved: that the following items would be reported to the LEP Board:

- i. A further letter to be sent to the relevant Secretary of State at the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities on behalf of Lancashire businesses, regarding business growth

10. Any Other Business

It was noted that an external evaluation into the Rosebud Fund had been commissioned, and a report would be going to LCDL at the end of the month. An item would be placed on the next agenda for an update on this.

Philip Hargreaves commented that Access to Finance was completing an evaluation around business's access to funds, which could be brought to the next meeting.

Resolved: that

- i. an item on the Rosebud evaluation be placed on the next agenda
- ii. an item on the Access to Finance evaluation for access to funds be placed on the next agenda

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Business Support Management Board was scheduled at 10.30am on 24 November 2022 in the Jordan Suite, County Hall.