

Private and Confidential

Inquorate LEP - Joint Scrutiny Committee

Notes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 8th March, 2023 at 2.00 pm at the Committee Room 'B' - The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston

Present

Mike Leckie (Chair)

Councillor Dave Brookes
Councillor Christopher Dixon
Councillor Louise Edge

Councillor Julian Finch
Councillor Terry Howarth

In Attendance

Andy Walker, LEP Interim Chief Executive

Debbie Francis OBE, LEP Chair

Andy Milroy, Democratic Services Manager (Companies), Lancashire County Council

Paul Evans, Assistant Director Area Lead, BEIS

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Councillor Paula Burdess, Councillor Mark Townsend and Councillor James Flannery. As a result it was noted that the meeting was inquorate and it was agreed to proceed with an informal meeting to discuss the agenda items presented.

2. Declaration of Interests

None

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2022

Resolved: The minutes from the last meeting of the LEP Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 18 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising

It was noted that at the last meeting it was suggested that an audit record of LEP activity be produced, which would notify the Committee of any audits that had taken place in LEP workstreams, how many issues and at what level had been identified by the auditors, and include a note of when actions had been discharged. This was under development and would be put on future meetings as a standing item.

Resolved: that the audit log be placed on future meetings as a standing item.

5. LEP Chief Executive's Update - March 2023

Andy Walker, LEP Interim Chief Executive, presented the report (circulated) summarising current issues and priorities in the LEP programme.

It was noted that the Annual Performance review had taken place and had identified no significant issues or areas of concern.

An announcement had been made on the government core grant funding for LEPs in 2023-24, which would be £250,000, a further reduction from the previous year. The LEP Company Members, the three upper tier authorities, had since agreed to continue to provide funding at their previous level. It was noted that the Growing Places fund was retained.

Business planning was currently underway for 2023-24, and the action plans for the 6 priority sectors were near completion.

The Committee were referred to the Lancashire 2050 Framework, and it was noted that the LEP was considering how to actively engage with those work programmes, with a view to potential future devolution arrangements for Lancashire.

The Committee were advised that any comments to be fed into the business planning, or engagement with the Lancashire 2050 work, could be passed to the LEP Chief Executive.

Resolved: that the LEP Joint Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) Noted the new central government financial settlement for LEPs in 2023/24.
- (ii) Considered the role the LEP can play in supporting the collaborative work of the local authorities around the Lancashire 2050 framework, and would pass feedback or comments to the LEP Chief Executive.
- (iii) Start to consider the trajectory for LEP integration into any future devolution arrangements within Lancashire.

6. Food & Agriculture Summary

Andy Walker, LEP Interim Chief Executive, presented the report (circulated) outlining the work to date of the Lancashire Food and Agriculture sector group.

The remit of the group was to consider the sustainability of the sector and the jobs within it, to consider how to improve productivity within the agriculture sector and rural business sector within Lancashire, to consider the wider contributions the rural economy makes to Lancashire's overall productivity and economic base, and to consider new and prevailing trends, such as the drive towards net zero and increased digitalisation.

It was noted that this was a sector that was badly hit by the pandemic, and businesses were now considering new ways of delivering the products and services.

The Committee were referred to a study by Amion consulting outlining the range of skills and labour market shortages within Lancashire's rural communities, and particularly the Food and Agriculture sector. Events had been held in boroughs with the largest proportion of the rural economy for education providers to highlight those skill shortages.

It was reported that the LEP had also been active in this work through securing Getting Building funding and other growth grants, which had enabled the creation of innovative provisions at centres of excellence such as Myerscough College where new digital farming practices and other technologies were demonstrated.

A question was asked around whether collaboration with the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board had been considered. It was agreed that this suggestion would be followed up, and it was noted that there was strong participation in the LEP sector group from the National Farmers Union.

It was noted that the Food and Agriculture Sector Plan would be presented to the LEP Board in March, and would be brought back to this Committee once finalised.

Resolved: that the Committee note the report.

7. Growing Places Fund Investment Strategy

Andy Walker, LEP Interim Chief Executive, presented the Growing Places Fund Investment Strategy (circulated).

It was noted that the strategy had been developed with a view to bringing the Growing Places programme into closer alignment with LEP priorities.

The Strategy also provides a systematic approach to the way applications would be considered, the process the projects would go through, and the external

scrutiny and risk identification undertaken before the investment decision process.

Committee members were invited to comment.

In response to a question around potentially using some Growing Places funding to support activity on the Warton Enterprise Zone site, it was noted that a business case detailing investment and potential development on that site was not yet completed; however, the LEP was committed to supporting the development of the site and the Growing Places fund was in a good position to actively support that development.

In response to a question around how much support was available to applicants through the application process, it was commented that there may be an argument for simplifying the application process and making that more contingent on the value of the end loan being requested, or to provide some revenue assistance for the costs of bringing together an application.

In response to a question around interest rates being a barrier to applicants, it was commented that the pricing structure had not so far been identified as a disincentive to applicants.

Resolved: that the Investment Strategy is noted.

8. Growing Places Fund Private Sector Leverage

Andy Walker, LEP Interim Chief Executive, presented the report (circulated) providing further information on private sector leverage achieved through the Growing Places Fund.

Resolved: that the report is noted.

9. LEP Joint Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24

Andy Walker, LEP Interim Chief Executive, presented the work programme (circulated).

Committee members were encouraged to consider items for future meetings.

Resolved: that the workplan was noted.

10. Any Other Business

None

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next LEP Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting was scheduled for 13th September 2023 at 2pm in Committee Room 'B' - The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston and via Microsoft Teams.