

DORSET LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

26 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 1.30 PM TO 4.00 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING

MINUTES

Board Attendees:

Aaron Lawes (AL)
Cecilia Buffon (CB) (Chair)
Ian Girling (IG)
Jim Andrews (JA)
Julia Howe (JH)
Luke Rake (LR)
Neil Skelland (NS)
Nick Gaines (NG)
Nicola Newman (NN)
Paul Gough (PG)
Paul Read (PR)
Cllr Simon Gibson (SG)
Cllr Spencer Flower (SF)

Also Present:

Adrian Trevett (AT) (BCP Council)
Aidan Dunn (AD) (Dorset Council)
Anwen Jones (AJ) (Cities and Local Growth Unit)
Rebecca Davies (RD) (Dorset LEP)
Vinita Nawathe (VN) (Dorset LEP)

Apologies:

Cllr Millie Earl (ME)
Cllr Vikki Slade (VS)

Item	Notes and Decisions	Action
1.	<p>Apologies were received for: Millie Earl and Vikki Slade</p> <p>Declarations of Interest: no declarations of interest were declared.</p>	
2.	<p>Chair's Update</p> <p>CB gave an update on the recruitment for the Chief Executive of the Great South West. Interviews have been held and a candidate chosen. This is on a fixed term contract until June 2025 and will be announced as soon as the contractual details have been sorted and references have been taken up.</p>	
3.	<p>Policy</p>	
3.1	<p>Next Steps Following Ministerial Letter and Technical Guidance</p> <p>VN started by saying that the last Board meeting and Strategy session took place before the Government issued their letter and technical guidance. VN said that good discussions had taken place and a way forward agreed.</p> <p>SF said that as the BCP Councillors will not be joining the meeting today, he did not want any decision to be made and would like to defer this agenda item until the next meeting.</p> <p>SF asked for a seconder to his proposal to defer discussion of the paper to the next meeting when BCP councillors would be present. NG seconded the proposal.</p>	
3.2	<p>Strategic Priorities and Evidence Base Refresh</p> <p>VN started by saying that part of our continued core-funded remit over the next six months is to make sure that we have an evidence base that's up to date, and to broker agreement on what the evidenced strategic opportunities and priorities are for the area. To this end, a data refresh and strategic priorities review would be taking place to ensure that come the new year we can all be shouting about them and be on the same page. She emphasised the need to be up to date with and reference Council plans and to make sure that our priorities and our evidence base are aligned. The work will start in the Autumn. It will involve desk research, interviews and workshops to get some buy in before a consultation draft goes out. This item is for noting, to make the board aware, and to ask board members to please take part.</p> <p>LR said he wanted to endorse this piece of work, which is very much core work of the LEP and, therefore, uncontentious. He said he did not see any reason why we should stop existing workflows.</p> <p>CB informed that this is in line with the conversations that the LEP Network have been having with officials and that the LEP Network is now working with Jacob Young. She said that LEPs across the country are experiencing different levels of alignment with the devolution deals that could be coming forward but they are all being encouraged to continue with their work plans.</p> <p>PR expressed his support for this piece of work.</p> <p>AJ reiterated, that Government are still expecting delivery to continue and the funding that has been provided is until March 2024. So we do need to see delivery over that period.</p>	

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4.	CIC Business	
4.1	<p>Nominations and Remuneration Committee Update</p> <p>JA stated that based on the conversations had at the previous couple of Board meetings around both the continuation of the current responsibilities and the ongoing work taking us through to 2025 funded by reserves, the Nominations and Remuneration Committee is responsible for ensuring that we have the right people in post to both run the company and maintain those projects. The Nominations and Remunerations Committee addresses a number of issues, as agreed at the last Board meeting.</p> <p>Firstly, the Committee looked at the terms for existing Directors and propose two extensions, CB and PR, to give us consistency in terms of Board leadership. Secondly the extension to VN's contract until March 2025.</p> <p>CB, PR and VN left the room.</p> <p>Action: The Board agreed to extend the terms for CB and PR.</p> <p>Action: The Board agreed to extend the contract for VN to March 2025.</p> <p>CB, PR and VN re-joined the meeting.</p> <p>JA explained that the Committee then looked at the composition of the Board membership across the different committees and propose to appoint Aaron Lawes to the Finance Committee.</p> <p>A volunteer is sought to replace Richard Smith who has now left the FACR Committee. NG volunteered.</p> <p>It is proposed that that Paul Hilliard will be replaced by Patrick Canavan on the Overview and Scrutiny committee.</p> <p>CB mentioned that Julia Howe is finding it hard to contribute to the Board meetings at the moment due to her workload. There is an opportunity for us to consider asking another FE Rep, Phil Sayles, if he has time to come back to the Board, so she will be taking that to the Remuneration Committee for consideration.</p>	<p>All agreed</p> <p>All agreed</p> <p>All noted and agreed</p>
4.2	<p>Finance, Audit and Corporate Risk Committee Update</p> <p>NN said that in the absence of a permanent chair, she chaired this Committee meeting. There were two main parts of the meeting, one was the current budget and spend and predicted spend to the end of March 2025, the other was a proposal around reinvesting the Growing Places Fund.</p> <p>We are on target and on budget in terms of the planned and agreed to spend to March 2025. There is a slight overspend but nothing of note. So that does mean, as agreed, we've got agreed budgets and funding through to March 2025 and that does give us space to continue to produce work and outcomes and invest.</p>	

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4.2	<p>Finance, Audit and Corporate Risk Committee Update Cont'd</p> <p>The Corporate Risk Register was discussed. VN mentioned that the one risk that has been on for quite some time and she would flag up, is the issue of constant uncertainty for the team. The potential to affect current delivery worries her. She informed that sometimes the team is walking into a meeting and people are talking about what is happening to the LEP. She asked for partners to be aware that there are people who are sensitive to the messaging that is coming out from some of your teams.</p> <p>NG highlighted the need to ensure risks that were captured on the register were current and of the right level to bring to the Board.</p>	
4.2	<p>Growing Places Fund</p> <p>NN then went on to talk to the paper regarding the Growing Places Fund. She explained that the Board had agreed at the last meeting that they wanted this fund to be recoverable and to have impact. They directed the Committee to develop a firm proposal and a draft prospectus to invite bids to make the most of the money. The Board were asked for their approval to go ahead and reopen the GPF loan fund with the issuing of this prospectus.</p> <p>VN informed that the S151 officer, who was present at the FACR Committee, confirmed that in the event of changes to the LEP, any outstanding loans would stay with the Council because they lend on our behalf and would manage the continuation. He was content with the proposal.</p> <p>LR noted the broadening of the criteria for measuring economic impact, particularly for the smaller micro businesses as they find it more difficult. He wanted to make sure the LEP will measure and see impact and that the projects will be monitored.</p> <p>NS asked for clarity around the scale of the projects the LEP was looking for. VN confirmed that we have had a range in the past, from £250,000 up to £3m.</p> <p>CB stated we would be looking for volunteers to help with the initial screening of projects to take forward to the due diligence phase.</p> <p>Action: PR, LR and NS volunteered to be part of the panel for screening the projects.</p>	<p>All Agreed To issue the GPF prospectus</p> <p>PR, LR, NS</p>
5.1	<p>Business Update</p> <p>RD took the paper as read and all noted the paper. RD highlighted a business accelerator that is being delivered through the Digital Skills Hub in Boscombe that kicked off on the 6 September.</p> <p>AL informed the first British Business Bank Investment Fund meeting was taking place on Thursday and he would report back.</p> <p>LR informed that the Future Farming Resilience Fund is being coordinated by Devon Council and it feels somewhat clustered around that part of the Southwest. They were present at the Dorset Show and there has been some engagement, with Kingston Maurward hosting an event for them.</p>	

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5.1	<p>Business Update</p> <p>NS updated on the Southwest Regional Defence and Security cluster. There was a networking event and the cluster has grown to over 300 members. The cluster are working closely with the MOD on innovation schemes and projects and have also got links into a network in Australia and companies from the US. The Diana project will be kicking off next year which is with NATO, and the test centre that the UK is offering for that project is the BattleLab. NS stated his ambition for Dorset LEP to do what it can to help the BattleLab, and the innovation park generally, to become an attractive place for NATO members to come and do test and evaluation etc. It will generate business for us as well as being an excellent facility for our own local companies.</p> <p>LR informed that he is Chair of the Rural Food and Farming group for the Great SW. He explained that they had drawn up a number of suggestions that could operate at scale across the Southwest. This piece of work will go to the GSW Board. Commenting on his role as rural champion on the board, LR noted that "rural" often requires slightly different solutions and it is good to see Dorset leading and facilitating the work across the SW.</p> <p>NW updated on a couple of projects related to digital. There is a bid in on behalf of the whole of the Southwest region looking at 5G networks. We should hear back in the next month or so and it would cover all of the other counties, as well as Dorset. NW also spoke about an open source networks project which would involve working with partners virtually as well as bringing them back into BattleLab on a regular basis.</p> <p>IG gave an update and informed business confidence is mixed depending on which sector you look at. Professional services, law firms, accountancy firms etc, all seem to be quite busy. The issues around staff retention and recruitment are still there and employers are having to do the very best they can to attract and keep the best staff at all levels across all sectors. He explained businesses are struggling with what to do in terms of reducing the carbon footprint but they know they need to do so. Business confidence is improving and it was quite positive that the Bank of England held the interest rate last week. He said that he hoped it would free up some business investment, as investment has been held back over the last 12 months and has not really recovered since the pandemic.</p> <p>Export was discussed and that it is a mixed story. Exports have increased but the smaller companies who do not have the infrastructure in place to export have struggled.</p> <p>AL mentioned that some businesses are struggling with longer supply chains which are taking longer to get stock, so they are having to order and pay earlier. Suppliers are shortening payment terms and saying that they need payment up front, so businesses are having to hold more stock and are tying up cash that way. If they are exporting, they are getting stretched in terms of their working capital requirements and that's having quite a big impact.</p>	

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5.2	<p>Skills Update</p> <p>RD informed that we have launched the Digital Skills Hub now which is proving to be busy and popular. A lot is scheduled over the next six months up to the end of the first year. RD noted there should be another refresh of the labour market information up to the end of September.</p> <p>Apprenticeships were discussed and the UCAS trial for promoting them. JA informed that this has been rolled out in schools and pushing that through one portal is going to help promote them to students. This covers all types of apprenticeships including degree apprenticeships, so it is a positive step. The bureaucracy around the apprenticeships was discussed and NN informed that this has been highlighted across the country in the Local Skills Improvement plans.</p> <p>NS suggested RD should ensure she is linked in with defence companies as they have a high demand for people and skills.</p> <p>AL asked whether there was an education piece for some businesses to be encouraged to take on apprenticeships or learning how to do it.</p> <p>NN explained that was one of the key outcomes of the report that also that the communication needs to be strengthened across all partners, all channels, all messages.</p>	
5.2.1	<p>Skills Advisory Panel and Board transition to Dorset Skills Board</p> <p>RD explained that following the Board meeting in July, revised terms of reference were agreed by the Dorset Skills Board in September and they agreed to change their name from the Skills Advisory Panel and Board to the Dorset Skills Board. The Dorset Skills Board will have a slightly increased membership and is also linked in with the Local Skills Improvement Plan. It is proposed that Nicola Newman will chair that group going forward. JA, who is part of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee, was at the meeting. This paper was written for JA as his recommendation to the Board to note and endorse those changes.</p> <p>CB thanked LR for all the work he has done as Chair of this Committee.</p> <p>Action: All approved change of name and chair for the Dorset Skills Board.</p>	All approved
6.	Minutes from the Last Meeting	
	The Minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the last meeting. There were no matters arising.	
7.	Any Other Business	

Note: Date of Next Meeting - 23 November at 10.00 am – in person meeting at Bournemouth University