

# CENTRAL AREA GROWTH BOARD

**When: Wednesday 2 August 2023 at 10:00**

**Where: Suite 1.02, Civic, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes,  
MK9 3EJ**

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Members of the Central Area Growth Board

Councillor Marland (Chair)

Councillors Nunn, Simmons, Smithers, Weir and Zerny

## **Enquiries**

Please contact Peter Brown on 01908 253671 or [peter.brown@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:peter.brown@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Information about membership and the Terms of Reference is available [here](#)

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## **Agenda**

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## Agenda

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair to welcome members of the Committee, officers and the public to the meeting and introduce committee members and officers who are present.

**2. Minutes (Pages 5 - 8)**

To approve, and the Chair to sign as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of Central Area Growth Board held on 14 February 2023.

**3. Disclosures of Interest**

Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests, other registerable interests, or non-registerable interests (including other pecuniary interests) they may have in the business to be transacted, and officers to declare any interests they may have in any contract to be considered.

**4. Election of Chair and Co-Chair**

To elect the Chair and Co-Chair of the Committee for the Council year 2023/24.

**5. Committee Matters 2023-24 (Pages 9 - 14)**

To consider Item 5.

**6. Future of regional working and the Local Enterprise Partnership (Pages 15 - 22)**

To consider Item 6.

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Minutes of the meeting of the CENTRAL AREA GROWTH BOARD held on 14 FEBRUARY 2023 at 10.00am.

**Present:** Councillor P Marland (Milton Keynes City Council) (Chair)  
Councillors D Hodgson (Bedford Borough Council), J Nunn (West Northamptonshire Council), J Smithers (North Northamptonshire Council), D Taylor (Luton Borough Council) and R Wenham (Central Bedfordshire Council).

**Apologies:** Councillor H Simmons (Luton Borough Council) substituted by Councillor D Taylor.

**Also Present:** C Austin (Bedford Borough Council), M Bracey (Milton Keynes City Council), R Bridge (North Northamptonshire Council), L Carver (Central Bedfordshire Council), H Chipping (SEMLEP), Councillor K Collins (Central Bedfordshire Council), K Hoctor (Cities and Local Growth Unit), P Horrocks (SEMLEP), S Lloyd (Milton Keynes City Council), N Monk (Luton Borough Council), P Northover (Cities and Local Growth Unit), S Timmiss (West Northamptonshire Council), Councillor B Wood (Cherwell District Council), C Stephens (Head of Legal Services) and three members of the public.

#### **CB01 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

Councillor Marland welcomed members and other attendees to this, the first in person meeting, of the Central Area Growth Board. Councillor Marland noted that there was no provision for public questions to be taken by the Board at this meeting but that he would raise this issue at the next Leaders meeting.

The Chair noted an apology from Councillor Simmons who would be substituted by Councillor Taylor.

#### **CB02 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

None declared.

#### **CB03 UPDATE ON DEVOLUTION DEALS**

The Head of Economic Development (MKCC) introduced the update report on devolution deals. The report summarised the current situation including the devolution framework and SEMLEP reorganisation.

During discussion on the item the following points were raised:

- (a) Member authorities indicated that they were happy to go along on this journey but there were no guarantees that any of them would join a combined authority and it was further noted that West and North Northamptonshire had recently undergone significant transformation;
- (b) Officers needed to be clear that this was about delegation of powers from Westminster down to local authorities and was in no way about delegating powers upwards;
- (c) It was noted that the bar would need to be set very high and would have to involve transformational, aspirational infrastructure opportunities which were unable to be delivered by an individual authority. Projects of that type of scale would be what would get residents excited about the delivery and any changes in powers;
- (d) It was suggested that each authority might wish to clarify for each other what their 'ask' might be in terms of infrastructure projects;
- (e) Members noted that previous discussions by the group had indicated that there was no appetite across the six authorities for a directly elected mayor model and therefore it was a Level 1 devolution framework that they would most likely be looking at;
- (f) It was further noted that the Level 2 model was what would most likely be pursued as there were not many things that can not be done better at a local rather than national level. For example a bus network over a wider area would be a better prospect than over a single local area;

Officers from the Cities and Local Growth Unit (CLGU) noted that they were currently prioritising Level 3 deals and that some of the recent deals that had been agreed had included other things that were not on the list, that is, the list was not exhaustive. Officers from the CLGU queried why members did not want to look at a Level 3 deal?

Members advised that at a fundamental level it was because of the need to have a directly elected mayor and they considered that there was no basis as to why this should be required. It was further noted that the member authorities were working collaboratively as a group but they were within three different economic regions, police and health structures were not co-terminus and two of the authorities had only recently gone through significant organisational transformations. Any deal would need to bring 'additionality' and deliver something on top of what the individual authorities already did.

Members considered that if a Level 2 deal was off the table that it looked like the central areas was being taken for granted. The area had been working collaboratively together for over a decade and only seemed to hear false promises when what was needed was clarity from central government.

Devolution should be about how the area wanted to organise itself not to be told how to organise itself by Whitehall. The area was delivering six percent of the housing growth in the country but was not being given the opportunity of a deal that would support this population growth.

Offices from CLGU confirmed that a Level 2 deal would be a combined authority without a directly elected mayor.

**ACTIONS ARISING:**

1. That Central Area Leaders note the update on the Devolution agenda and the future of the LEP.
2. That officers in Central Area authorities investigate and seek clarity on the government's devolution agenda in line with the Central Area's priorities, and investigate pursuing a Level 2 deal.

**CB04 UPDATE ON OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE PAN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

Councillor Wood from Cherwell District Council introduced the update paper on the Oxford-Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership.

The paper was an information report that set out a synopsis of what the Pan Regional Partnership was seeking to do. It was a culmination of many years work that set out a model of collaboration across a broader geography. There was no invasion of sovereignty, it was a partnership of the willing, and did not intend to replicate the work of other partnerships or individual authorities.

The Chair noted that he had received a question from a member of the public that commented that the Growth Board and Pan Regional Partnership needed to ensure that they both had buy in from the private sector at an early stage.

Members noted that they could be best described as lukewarm towards the concept of the Pan Regional Partnership. They did not feel that it was clearly defined or that it wouldn't duplicate work already being carried out by other organisations or authorities. Members were cautious given they made up the largest and fastest growing area of the Pan Regional Partnership yet the focus seemed very much on Oxford and Cambridge.

It was further noted that while members might be underwhelmed and jaded by the proposal there was some recognition as to the need to be part of it to see where it goes and to be able to bring about change from within.

Members raised concern about the cost and time associated with developing a prospectus for the Pan Regional Partnership and that there needed to be better definition of the benefits it might bring and there were also concerns raised about the democratic accountability of the many subgroups that the partnership had created.

Members considered that if the 'Arc' was easily definable and deliverable it would not have taken 50 years to get to this point and the business/university first model which seemed to be the focus might not meet the needs of residents outside of Oxford or Cambridge.

Councillor Wood summed up by noting that there was no intention to step on sovereignty or for this to be seen as an alternative to devolution. This was a separate entity that was seeking to work collaboratively as a region on a narrow range of objectives. It was noted that there would be benefits to being part of the collaboration but if there weren't then authorities were always free to leave.

Members noted that further clarity as to what was on the table would be helpful so that limited officer resource could be best deployed.

**ACTIONS ARISING:**

That the update report on the Oxford-Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership be noted.

**CB05 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates of meetings for 2023/24 would be confirmed and circulated in due course.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.20



# Central Area Growth Board Report

2 August 2023

## Committee Matters 2023/24

<b>Report author</b>	<b>Sophie Lloyd</b> Head of Economic Development, Milton Keynes City Council
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### 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That members appointed by each Local Authority on the Central Area Growth Board as set out in 3.1, be noted.
- 1.2 That Central Area Growth Board representatives on regional bodies, as set out in 6.2 are agreed, and further nominations for vacancies are also agreed.
- 1.3 That the Central Area Growth Board be renamed South East Midlands Authorities (SEMA) as of 2 August meeting.

### 2. Purpose of the Central Area Growth Board

- 2.1 The purpose of the Central Area Growth Board is set out in its Terms of Reference, which were last updated in October 2021 and subsequently taken through the relevant governance processes at each member Local Authority.
- 2.2 Appendix 1 details the purpose of, and tasks of, the Growth Board in full.

### 3. Membership of the Growth Board for the 23/24 municipal year

- 3.1 Local Authorities have made the following nominations to the Growth Board for the 2023/24 municipal year:

Local Authority	Leader/Mayor
Bedford Borough Council	Councillor Jim Weir (Deputy Mayor)
Central Bedfordshire Council	Councillor Adam Zerny (Leader)
Luton Borough Council	Councillor Hazel Simmons (Leader)
Milton Keynes City Council	Councillor Pete Marland (Leader)
North Northamptonshire Council	Councillor Jason Smithers (Leader)
West Northamptonshire Council	Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Leader)

#### **4. Chairing of the Growth Board meetings**

- 4.1 The Central Area Growth Board works on a municipal year basis. To date, the Growth Board has worked on a Co-Chairing basis, with co-Chairs nominated at the start of each municipal year. The May 2023 Local Elections have led to changes in leadership at two member authorities, the Elected Mayor of Bedford is now Mayor Tom Wootton, and Central Bedfordshire saw a change in control of the Council, with Councillor Adam Zerny elected as Leader.
- 4.2 At this meeting of the 2 August 2023, the Growth Board will need to elect a Chair and Co-Chair for the 2023 / 24 municipal year.

#### **5. Renaming of the Central Area Growth Board**

- 5.1 The government has indicated a 'minded to' decision that would bring economic support currently delivered by Local Enterprise Partnerships under local democratic control. Whilst it will not deliver services itself, there is a clear need for the Central Area Growth board to show leadership over economic issues across the South East Midlands area.
- 5.2 Leaders therefore may wish to consider the current branding of the growth board, and whether using the existing brand of the 'South East Midlands' would serve the area better than using 'central area.' This will improve national positioning, giving the area a clear brand unrelated to its positioning within the Arc.

#### **6. Nominated representatives from the Central Area Growth Board for 23/24**

- 6.1 The Central Area is entitled to a number of political representatives within regional bodies.
- 6.2 It is asked to confirm the following representatives for the 23/24 municipal year:
  - a) Oxford – Cambridge pan regional partnership

The Central Area is entitled to two political representatives on the Oxford-Cambridge pan regional partnership

X1 Chair of Central Area Growth Board
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X1 Co-Chair of the Central Area Growth Board
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The Central Area also is entitled to representation on three pan-regional partnership workstreams:

- i) Innovation and Economy group

X1 Political representative – Currently vacant
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x1 Officer representative - Currently the Head of Economic Development at MK City Council
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ii) Environment group

Currently, most Local Authorities in the Central Area are represented on this group, which has a large membership. The growth board has not yet been asked to nominate representatives to this workstream.

iii) Identity and branding (Communications) group

X2 representatives from the Central Area to sit on the steering group

X1 Political representative – currently vacant
x1 Officer representative – currently vacant

(b) England’s Economic Heartlands

All six local authorities in the Central Area are members of England’s Economic Heartlands (EEH) and entitled to a place on the Strategic Transport Leadership board as a result.

The Central Area Growth Board is also an associate member of the Transport Leadership Board, and entitled to send a representative as a result – to be noted that this associate member would not have voting rights.

X 2 representatives from the Central Area

X1 Political representative – Currently vacant
x1 Officer representative – currently the Chief Executive of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership

## **Appendix 1 – Stated Purposes and Tasks of the Growth Board (extract from Terms of Reference)**

### **3 PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE CENTRAL AREA GROWTH BOARD**

3.1 The Growth Board will only exercise the relevant functions which have been delegated to it by each constituent authority. Consequently, and without prejudice to the generality of this, the decision-making powers on planning matters, will remain vested with the Local Planning Authority for each constituent authority, as set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

#### **Purpose**

3.2 The purpose of the Growth Board is to work towards the following outcomes in relation to the Central Area:

- a) Accelerate the delivery of planned growth across the area, where this is enabled by investment in infrastructure and services.
- b) Provide the strategic leadership that will enable existing mechanisms and processes to plan for, and realise an economic transformation across the area.
- c) Secure long term benefits and opportunities for local communities, and
- d) Attract increased private sector investment.

#### **Main Tasks**

3.3 The Growth Board does not have any formal allocation of functions from constituent authorities, however its main tasks relate to the exercise of the constituent authorities' powers under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 insofar as they relate to the promotion of development or economic growth or matters ancillary to this in the Central Area, and in relation to the matters listed below:

- a) To apply for central government funding in the name of the Central Area Growth Board, and if received, to determine priorities for expenditure and direct such expenditure and direct the Accountable Body or other constituent authority to implement these.
- b) To respond to consultations, express views and make recommendations to Government and others, including partners, on matters of general importance to the Central Area. This will all be in the name of the Central Area Growth Board. This will include on:
  - i) Proposals for major development, including local plans.
  - ii) Proposals for major infrastructure.
  - iii) Funding submissions to Government or its agencies.
  - iv) Economic plans and strategies

#### **Other Tasks of the Growth Board**

3.4 To provide the strategic leadership by representing the Central Areas as a whole, which will enable the constituent authorities to plan for, and realise, an economic transformation across the Central Area, speaking to Government and its Agencies with one co-ordinated voice and encouraging private sector investment.

- 3.5 To seek to establish Common Planning Areas to produce an integrated and holistic approach to strategic planning for employment, housing and infrastructure that builds on Local Plans, Local Transport Plans and Economic Plans and Strategies.
- 3.6 Coordination in reviewing whether spatial planning, infrastructure and public services are integrated and make recommendations to encourage this.
- 3.7 To accelerate and increase the delivery of planned growth across the area, where this is enabled by investment in infrastructure and services.
- 3.8 To work to influence the route planning options, in order to realise the opportunity for the area in the Cambridge-Milton Keynes- Oxford growth corridor, (road and rail) and other associated linkages that may be delivered.
- 3.9 To approve and monitor the implementation of Central Area programmes of work including those flowing from any Place Deals, Economic Plans and transport strategies and other relevant infrastructure programmes as agreed. (This is not an exhaustive list and may be expanded by agreement of the Growth Board).
- 3.10 To bid for and secure investment, including from Government and external sources of resources to support the above purposes.
- 3.11 Advise partners on matters of collective interest.
- 3.12 Commission and share research and analysis in support of the preparation of statutory and non-statutory plans and strategies (including local plans and economic plans). This will include work designed to assist compliance with the duty to cooperate in connection with plan-making.
- 3.13 Lead and coordinate the Homes England liaison process on Central Area wide regeneration and housing issues and contribute to any related interaction with Government agencies.
- 3.14 Provide a forum for partnership working and collaboration on spatial planning, economic development, housing, transport, and general infrastructure issues.
- 3.15 Input into delivery of a local Industrial Strategy for the Central Area.
- 3.16 Engage with and represent the Central Area to the Sub-national Transport Body covering the Central Area.
- 3.17 Wherever possible, the Growth Board will aim to streamline existing processes.
- 3.18 To contribute and be an active member of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc governance arrangements.
- 3.19 These tasks will be exercised concurrently with the constituent members' own primary exercise of responsibilities in these area, and subject to the primary responsibilities. This means that even where the Growth Board has resolved that a certain course of action be followed, one or more of the constituent authorities may then decide to take a different approach.

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# Central Area Growth Board Report

2 August 2023

## Future of regional working and the Local Enterprise Partnership

**Report author**     **Sophie Lloyd**  
Head of Economic Development, Milton Keynes City Council

### 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Leaders formally confirm as a collective that the Growth Board's position is for the LEP to close on 31 March 2024 following the government's 'minded to' announcement to stop distributing core funding to Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- 1.2 That Leaders formally endorse through the Growth Board the approach that an Expression of Interest process (if current funding is made available by government) for the services in paras 3.3 to 3.8, is run with Local Authority partners as soon as practical.
- 1.3 That the Central Area (Local Authorities) view outlined in this note is formally sent to the Task and Finish group to form the basis of a more detailed paper advising the SEMLEP board on future options.
- 1.4 That Leaders provide any guidance on thinking regarding the 'core' SEMLEP work as outlined in paras 4.6 to 4.7 to advise officers on development of options for these services.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 For the 2 August 2023 Growth Board meeting, officers were asked to prepare a paper on the future of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) services and the options that the Central Area now has.
- 2.2 A process will shortly be underway following the Chief Executives meeting on 23 June 2023 to gauge Local Authority interest in running South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) services. Given initial informal discussions indicate there is an appetite for these services to be run in house, a Task and Finish group has been setup to advise the SEMLEP board of options ahead of its September 2023 meeting. Any authority expressing an interest in running a service on behalf of the area will need to be supported by others in fully exploring all transition arrangements and will need to undertake a due diligence process themselves.

2.3 This note has been prepared in the context of uncertainty about future government funding for core LEP services, and the Careers and Enterprise and Growth Hubs. It is hoped that government will make a statement on its position, to aid Local Authority partners in assessing future options.

### 3. SEMLEP current position

3.1 SEMLEP has recently undertaken a restructuring exercise to reduce costs. This has resulted in a reduction of around nine members of staff.

3.2 The work of SEMLEP can broadly be broken down into three distinct services (paras 3.3 to 3.10). Currently, none of these services are running a balanced budget, with service funding not fully covering costs. A one-off deficit budget was approved by the SEMLEP board for 2023/24. The SEMLEP board agreed that for 23/24 there could be a deficit of up to £400k for the whole year. This would be funded from some of the of repaid Growing Places Fund, which was set aside by Board agreement in 2018 for contingency measures.

#### Careers Hub

3.3 The Careers Hub is a project delivered by SEMLEP on behalf of the government's Careers and Enterprise company<sup>1</sup>. The hub aims to prepare young people for the world of work, improving careers education, advice and guidance and bringing schools and employers together.

3.4 **Funding:** Comes from the Department for Education through the Careers and Enterprise company (CEC), £242k per annum.

3.5 Funding runs from August to August and can be drawn down with match funding from the LEP and other sources. The amount included in the Funding Agreement from August 2023 to August 2024 is a maximum of £418k, depending on the availability of match funding. For the 23/24 financial year, the current estimate is around £302k of funding based on the claims that are expected to be made. Some posts are fully funded by the CEC and others require match funding<sup>2</sup>. The CEC is prescriptive about the roles within the organisation and their funding. Where match funding is required this comes from a variety of sources including LEP Core Funding from DLUHC, Growing Places Fund, Colleges, Local Authorities and the Connelly Foundation – an educational charity in Bedfordshire.

#### SEMLEP Growth hub

3.6 The Growth Hub employs trained business advisors to provide local businesses with support, information and guidance. In addition, the Growth Hub runs events and, in the past, has run programmes including Growth Curve (funded through European funding) to support scale ups.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Careers & Enterprise Company | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Strategic Careers Hub lead and the Operational lead and funded through the CEC and many of the other roles require an element of local match funding.



3.7 Two grant schemes have recently been launched through the Growth Hub that will be running to March 2025. These are the Resilience and Innovation grant and the Growing Innovation Fund, both funded through repaid Growing Places Fund. £175k per annum has been top-sliced from the available Grant funding to administer the two grants.

3.8 **Funding:** Comes from the Department for Business, and Trade (DBT). The Growth Hub is required as a condition of this funding to maintain monthly business intelligence reporting to DBT.

#### SEMLEP Core staffing

3.9 This activity includes management, finance and communications, plus work on inward investment, sector advisory groups, analysis and evidence gathering for the whole area (including as an example labour market information) and delivery against regional policies.

3.10 Funding : Comes from Department For Levelling Up, Housing & Communities – this is the funding the government has indicated it is minded to withdraw. This is supplemented by other Local Authority and University contributions.

#### LEP funding

3.11 Additional sources of funding are provided from:

- Local Authority Contributions - £100k for 2023/24 (per annum)
- University Contributions - £20k for 2023/24 (per annum)

3.12 It is worth noting that not all of these annual contributions have yet been received in the 23/24 financial year.

3.13 The six SEMLEP authorities have given a clear indication to the SEMLEP Chair and Chief Executive that the SEMLEP Board should now agree to wind up the company at the end of March 24. This included the idea of running an expression of interest for member Local Authorities to indicate their interest in running the Careers and Enterprise Hub and Growth Hub as shared services.

3.14 Luton have indicated that they will continue as SEMLEP accountable body to oversee the close down financial requirements. There will need to be detailed discussions on the legacy role (with regards to monitoring and evaluation) for previous funding regimes SEMLEP was responsible for.

#### SEMLEP Assets and Staffing

3.15 All SEMLEP staff are on short term contracts which currently end on 31 March 2024 (except for members of the Careers Hub, whose contracts run until August 2024 in line with the CEC funding agreement. There is a break clause in the agreement in the event that SEMLEP ceases to exist after March 2024.) The agreement could be passed across to another host body if necessary.

## Financial assets

- 3.16 SEMLEP received around £17.3m of Growing Places Fund (GPF) in 2012. Most of this was distributed in loans which have largely been repaid. In 2017, with the merger with Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership, a further sum of around £3.7m was transferred. A further £3.1m of Growing Places Fund is due to be repaid to SEMLEP, which will be held by the Accountable Body on behalf of SEMLEP.
- 3.17 SEMLEP recently launched an Innovation grants initiative which is worth around £7m<sup>3</sup>. The larger grant scheme is likely to be fully allocated by the end of 2023, but with projects completing by March 2025. The smaller grant scheme, is running rounds of the scheme bi-monthly, so there could still be money to allocate to businesses by March 2024, with the intention that projects complete by March 2025. As the SEMLEP is now likely to be wound up soon after grants are awarded there will be an accountable body role which needs to continue to manage any remaining payment(s) and the monitoring of grants. There will also need to be a decision about whether to continue to deliver the grant scheme as planned until March 2025 as part of a possible future Growth Hub model. In the event that not all funding is allocated, it is recommended that this funding, along with the balance of the GPF funding (including the £3.1m outstanding repayments) should be available to the six local authorities, who through a new governance structure would take responsibility for its future allocation.
- 3.18 It should be noted that the SEMLEP Board took a decision which earmarks £2m of repaid GPF for use as a contingency to support the organisation in times of uncertainty and reduced funding from Government. Around £200k has already been used to support the deficit budget in 2022/23. A further sum (up to £400k) will be required for 23/24.
- 3.19 There is also a general reserve in place, it is estimated to be around £1m, earmarked for the costs of winding up the organisation including any further redundancy payments.

## Enterprise Zones

- 3.20 There are two Enterprise Zones, Northampton Waterside and Luton, established in 2012 and 2017 respectively. Northampton is well established and return from the business rates uplift is projected from 2026/27. Luton's EZ is less well established. Memorandums of understanding and governance will require review following the closure of SEMLEP.
- 3.21 A financial provision will need to be made from balances to cover the cost of Luton BC continuing in the role to close down the accounts and funding, which is likely to include the distribution of balances post closedown of SEMLEP.

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<sup>3</sup> Two grant schemes are being run; Resilience and Innovation grants up to a total of £2m for small grants (between £5k and £50k) and Growing Innovation grants up to a total of £5m for larger grants of between £100k and £300k

## **4. Future operations of existing SEMLEP services**

### Future of Careers Hub

- 4.1 If funding from CEC beyond August 2024 , there is case for the Careers Hub being hosted by a willing local authority.
- 4.2 The delivery of the Careers Hub across the six local authority areas could continue as now, subject to match funding continuing. In the event this function continues staff could transfer to a lead local authority and it should be possible to negotiate suitable TUPE arrangements. It should be noted that funding and Careers Hub staff contracts are in place until August 2024, and therefore if the LEP is wound up in March 2024 an interim host authority will be required, if a new host has not already been identified.

### The Future of the Growth Hub

- 4.3 If funding for the Growth Hub from the Department for Business and Trade is confirmed from April 2024, there is a case for a local authority acting as host and potentially working on a hub and spoke/shared service model with other authorities wishing to maintain the potential benefits and established working relationships. The opportunity to take on this role will be the subject of an expression of interest process.
- 4.4 WNC have already indicated a potential interest in this role pending due diligence and an understanding of the finances and commitment. The previous head of the SEMLEP Growth Hub joined WNC as Head of Economic Growth & Inward Investment in July 2023, bringing her developed skills, knowledge, and relationships with the other authorities. The opportunity exists In West Northants as it shapes a new Economic Growth and Inward Investment section to encompass the Growth Hub function for the functional economic area and host this service across any involved authority areas.
- 4.5 In the event this function continues staff could transfer to a lead local authority and it should be possible to negotiate suitable TUPE arrangements.

### Future of the SEMLEP Core work – moving forwards on cross regional collaboration

- 4.6 In addition to the services mentioned above, there is also a need to consider how the area will work together on areas of cross boundary importance. The Central Area growth board was primarily set up to coordinate work of cross boundary importance and now should start to consider what role it wishes to play in a post LEP world. There is also a need to consider how this interfaces with the work of the pan-Regional partnership and how business voice can feed in moving forwards.

#### 4.7 Initial questions for Leaders to consider:

- a) At the time of writing the paper, there was uncertainty as to whether financial support for these functions from central Government will be received by Local Authorities and the quantum of funding available.
- b) How will we handle the relationship we have with the Department of Business and Trade in a post LEP world – how will enquiries and engagement that previously went through the LEP Core team first be handled?
- c) How can we involve businesses and ensure the voice of the private sector is involved in the Growth Board’s work moving forwards? This could be an area of real opportunity and strengthen the voice of the central area in Pan Regional Partnership discussions.
- d) Local Authority Leaders will be the decision makers through the Central Area growth board mechanism, and would benefit from thinking about m a mechanism (possibly a business board) to inform/guide their thinking as is standard practice in Combined Authorities. There is also an opportunity to give this a sectoral focus too – e.g. an automotive/high tech engineering group of employers across this area would hold real national sway.
- e) What would we like to do on business intelligence and engagement work? Could this be covered by shared systems (for example a CRM system) to allow more easy sharing of information between the growth hub and relevant local authorities?

## 5. Alternative options

### Contracted Services

5.1 Elsewhere<sup>4</sup> local Chambers of Commerce have contracted with Local Authorities to provide Growth Hub services across a wider than single Local Authority area. With Leaders and Chief Executives having expressed that an Expression of Interest process should be run to establish where services should be held in future, this option is not currently being explored.

### CIC model

5.2 In other areas of the country (for example Coventry and Warwickshire), the local authorities are forming a holding company (Community Interest Company or similar) for the Growth Hub to continue to run as an independent organisation, but with the relevant local authorities being shareholders / board members in the model. This is a model which could be explored should there be interest to explore alternative models.

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<sup>4</sup> Birmingham, New Anglia

## **6. Future meetings**

- Central Area Growth Board (2 August)
- SEMLEP Board Task and Finish group meet (15 August)
- SEMLEP Board (13 September)
- Extraordinary Central Area Growth Board meeting (TBC – September, if required)
- Next ordinary Central Area Growth Board meeting (19 October)

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