

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Area Growth Board held on Wednesday 14 February 2024 at 10:00

Present: Councillors Marland (Chair), Nunn, Simmons and Smithers
H Chipping and P Horrocks

Apologies: Councillors Weir and Zerny

Officers: M Bracey, L Church, M Coiffait, A Earnshaw, V Hlomuka, S McNamara,
L Seymour, P Thomas, A Wylie and R Tidman

CGB18 Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Marland welcomed attendees to the meeting.

CGB19 Minutes

RESOLVED :

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Area Growth Board held on the 12 December 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CGB19(a) Exempt Minutes

RESOLVED :

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Central Area Growth Board held on the 12 December 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CGB20 Disclosures of Interest

None received.

CGB21 LEP Transition Update

The Board received an update on the LEP transition following decisions made at the 12 December 2023 meeting. Officers at West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) had been working with colleagues at SEMLEP on the transition arrangements including TUPE arrangements for nineteen staff. Draft Heads of Terms were being progressed and WNC had recently reported to their Executive to approve transition arrangements. It was noted that a report on the Heads of Term would need to be agreed by each authority via their executive. Future governance would need to be considered, which potentially could mean the establishment of a Joint Committee. It was further noted that in addition to the transition work that meetings had been held with business representatives as to arrangements going forward. Further information on this would be provided in a later item.

The report recommended that a further meeting of the Board may be needed to confirm management fees, residual body costs and transfer costs and provide assurances to WNC going forward.

Members suggested that the principle was that existing LEP services would be migrated across to WNC and that any future liability would be covered from the LEP reserves and it was not intended that any future liabilities would be covered by any of the authorities. It was noted that WNC required formal reassurance from the authorities that those reserves would be retained for any liabilities. It was further noted that the Board had already agreed a formal review after six months specifically with regard to the financial position.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Growth Board:
 - a) note the update contained within this report;
 - b) agree in principle to establish a Joint Committee, and request that arrangements to do so are progressed by the respective Monitoring Officers in consultation with the Leaders of the member authorities; and
 - c) consider the desirability of a further meeting in March/early April.

CGB22 Proposed Business Engagement Plans

The Board received an update on the plans as to how to incorporate ‘the voice of businesses’ in future arrangements. It was noted that the Government had published additional guidance setting out further detail on how they expected this to work and it was further noted that the CAGB had identified at their last meeting the importance of engagement with business stakeholders on draft proposals. There was an expectation from the Government that local authorities would create or continue to engage with an economic growth board and that membership of the Board would be selected through an open and transparent process. The Government had also set out some detail on the type of organisations that they considered could form membership of the Board.

Officers advised that engagement with local stakeholders had been undertaken with the existing SEMPLEP Board and other groups such as the business engagement group and business leaders. Feedback from this engagement indicated that there was a strong desire for business support to continue and reassurance was sought that the growth board would consider under new arrangements. It was indicated that it was important the board had a clear purpose and remit to ensure businesses engaged with it and a recognition of the ongoing importance of the skills agenda to businesses. Feedback indicated that the size of the board needed to be large enough to be representative but small enough for voices to be heard.

It was anticipated that recruitment to the Board would begin in mid-April but that it was likely that it would not be operational until June so some thought may need to be given to transition arrangements such as the Growth Hub Board continuing to

provide oversight and the Careers Hub establishing a steering committee as well as the Business Board providing representation to provide business input particularly into the development of the new economic strategy.

It was queried as to what would be on the agenda of the advisory Business Board and it was understood that one of the first requirements would be to create or update an Economic Strategy for the region and for it to also be allowed to develop its own work programme. It was further suggested that the Chair of the advisory board might also be a member of the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership.

It was raised as to whether it was thought necessary for a representative of one of the six local authority leaders and a senior officer to be on the advisory board and that expectations would also need to be managed as to the limited officer time and funding availability as opposed to those boards that may be in areas that have a devolution deal in place.

It was highlighted by one of the associate members that compared to the proposals occurring in other parts of the country it was considered that in this area that the level of business engagement proposed going forward was weaker, there was no identifiable independent leadership role fulfilling the front facing role the SEMLEP CEO had taken up until now, that there may be issues with waiting for recruitment of a new board versus evolving the existing structure, the Chair was required to be an independent business person and it was advised to use the term non-voting member.

It was noted that further discussion was needed about the role and potential remuneration of the Chair of the advisory board, the number of Leaders that might be members of the board and the transition arrangements including engagement with all sectors, that is within our means.

There may be consideration to nominating Leaders or Cabinet members to sit on the advisory business board.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Growth Board endorse:
 - a) the business engagement principles set out in the report; and
 - b) the timescale and recruitment plans for the business board as set out in the report.
3. The Growth Board recommended adding three local authority members (the CAGB lead for business, and two political representatives nominated leaders) and a lead local authority senior officer to the board.
4. The Growth Board recommended reviewing the VCS representative as to the purpose of their inclusion.
5. The Growth Board requested that officers work with them to scope out the role of the Chair of the Business Advisory Board.

6. That the Growth Board nominate Councillor Marland to lead the recruitment panel and activity.
7. That the Growth Board nominate Councillor Nunn as the lead member to progress arrangements for the Business Advisory Board
8. That the Growth Board endorse the Terms of Reference for the business board once drafted by written procedure before 15 April 2024.

CGB23 Update on Branding Exercise

The Board received a presentation from Whistlejacket on the results of the recent rebranding exercise.

It was indicated that while members were keen to move at pace and agree a new name by the end of March, the fall back position was to continue to use the South East Midlands branding. It was noted that any new name should be transferrable to a combined authority.

RESOLVED:

1. The Growth Board agreed:
 - a) That Leaders note the update provided by Whistlejacket at the 14 February meeting.
 - b) That in light of the findings, that a second stage of the naming and branding work is undertaken to rebrand the area of the six unitary authorities with a new name.
 - c) That the new name and brand should constitute a clean break from previous titles.
 - d) That the branding work should conclude as quickly as possible, noting the SEMLEP close date of the end of March 2024.
 - e) That a Leaders meeting is arranged before the end of February for Whistlejacket to present the next stage of the branding working.
 - f) That if the new brand is not ready by March 2024, that a fall back position of using the current 'South East Midlands' branding, be investigated.