

Central Area Growth Board Report

12 December 2023

Update on Future of LEP Functions

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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the report be noted.
- 1.2 That a further update on progress with LEP integration, be brought to the February meeting of the Growth Board
- 1.3 That the Growth Board Consider the options for the funding envelope for the LEP functions for 24/25 (as set out in Exempt Annex A)

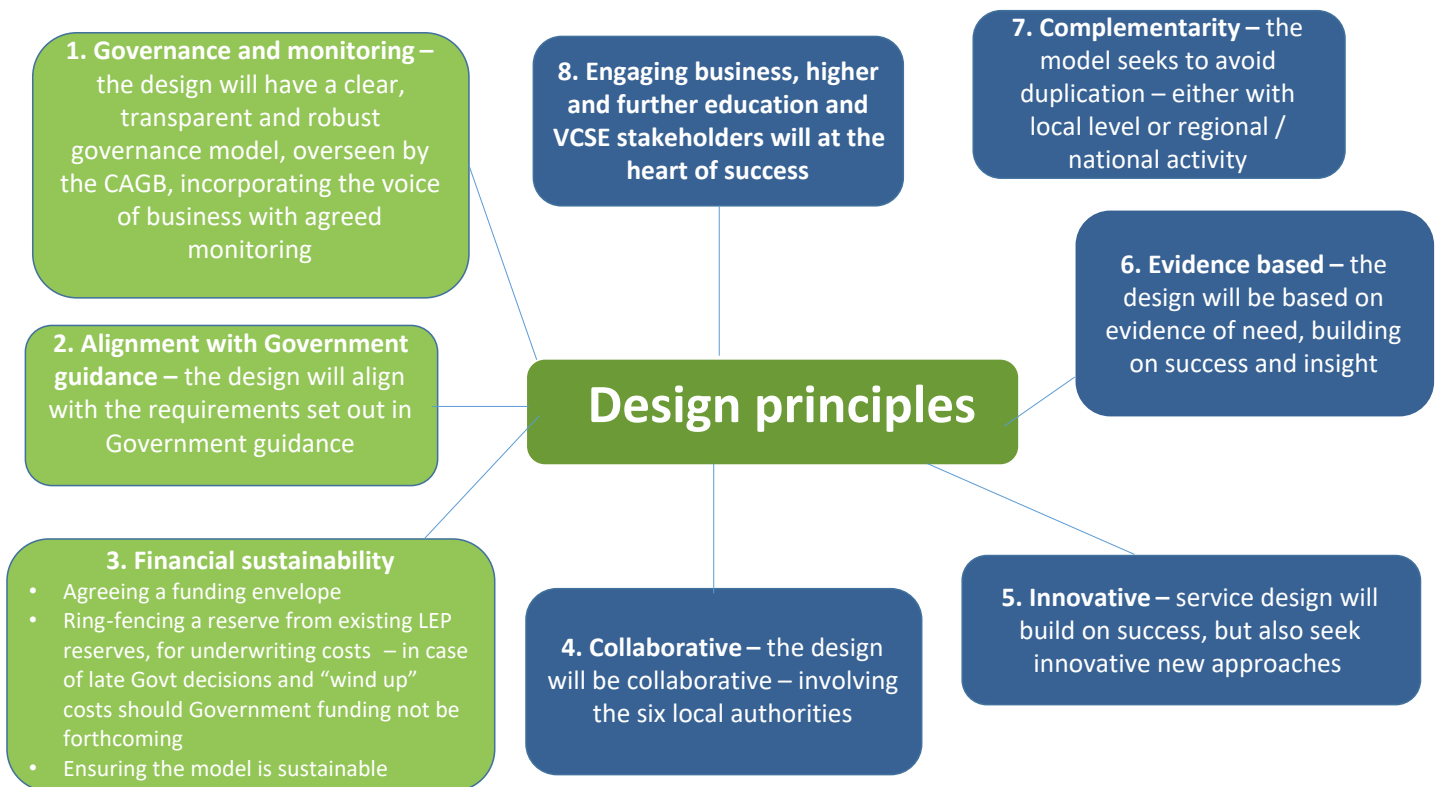
2. Background

- 2.1 The Government confirmed their decision in August 2023 to integrate LEP functions within local democratic institutions. A locally run expression of interest process for the local authorities with the South East Midlands was then initiated to identify a local authority to act as a host local authority for LEP functions.
- 2.2 At the 19 October 2023 Growth Board meeting, Leaders formally endorsed the recommendation that West Northamptonshire Council should be the host local authority to take on all LEP functions, including strategic economic planning and business representation on or before 1 April 2024. There was also an agreement that an update would be provided to the 12 December 2023 meeting of the Central Area Growth Board on progress of the detailed implementation process for future of LEP functions.

3. Co-producing the service design and principles for the LEP functions

- 3.1 The Local Authority officer - task and finish group met in mid-November to contribute to the future LEP functions including agreeing a set of design principles as a framework for the design and reviewing the current LEP functions in line with a request from Government to complete an integration plan template for the LEP integration by the 30th November.
- 3.2 The task and finish group discussion created a framework for a workshop which was held with Leaders and Chief Executives from each of the six authorities on the 23rd November which included a discussion about the future LEP functions and service design, including initial discussions about governance of the LEP functions.

3.3 The following design principles were agreed as part of the away day:



3.4 There was also a discussion about the future functions of the LEP in line with these design principles, particularly ensuring they are aligned with Government guidance and requirements. As a result of this discussion, the following areas are the main areas which will be the focus of future LEP functions:

- Strategic economic planning - Building on the work that the LEP have done in this arena on economic planning and committing to working together on maintain an up to date Economic Strategy for the area which complements existing activity and any other related specific studies which are prioritised
- Regional economic insight - Future activity is likely to comprise regional economic insight and analysis which is required to inform, monitor and review an economic strategy and future priorities
- Growth Hub Including business support, workshops, events and business grants (where funding is sought to deliver these) in line with DBT requirements.
- Careers Hub - Including continuing to deliver in line with CEC requirements to connect careers advice and guidance in schools and Colleges with the needs of the local economy.
- Business and sector engagement - Business engagement is an important part of the new model and will involve the creation of a new business board (or similar). We want to ensure with regards to future activity that we get the

right balance of activity in line with priorities emerging from strategic economic planning.

- 3.5 All members who attended the away day were clear that there was significant benefit in working together to leverage our combined voice, propositions and potential.
- 3.6 Further work will continue over the next few months to ensure the retained LEP functions are incorporated into revised terms of reference for the CAGB including strategic oversight, performance monitoring and a direct relationship with the business engagement model (as outlined in item 4).
- 3.7 The Integration Plan template was completed following the away day and circulated to all Local Authorities and the LEP for input prior to submission on the 30 November 2023.

4. Due diligence and preparation for the integration within West Northamptonshire Council

- 4.1 An internal project team has been formed within West Northamptonshire council to oversee the integration process internally which is managed through the transformation team with a project plan and workstreams for the critical enabling areas to effect the transition. The current workstreams include:
 - Governance / Legal – Including confirming the governance arrangements, oversight of the risk register and any contractual / legal requirements
 - Communications / stakeholder engagement – Including supporting the branding work that is being undertaken for the Growth Board, developing the communications strategy pre April and also plans for the communications function post Integration
 - Finance – Including setting a draft budget for 24/25, working with the current accountable body and the LEP.
 - IT / Data – to ensure smooth transition for IT and data and ensure a smooth transition for equipment and IT services for the LEP team.
 - Assets – Including physical location for the team
 - HR – including supporting the TUPE process and the onboarding of LEP team
 - Project Management – including managing the project plan and workstreams.
 - Service design – this is referenced in section 3 as a co-production model with each local authority involved.
- 4.2 The internal project team is meeting fortnightly, as well as more detailed work being underway in each workstream. One of the main current focus of activities is outlining budget options for 24/25 as outlined in the exempt annex.
- 4.3 WNC and the other local authorities are also working closely with SEMLEP to prepare for the integration, including working with the SEMLEP Chief Executive and team on the transfer and preparing for upcoming SEMLEP board meetings and decisions.