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| Meeting date: | 28 September 2021 | | | | |
| Agenda Item: | 3 | | | | |
| Item Subject: | Marches LEP Chair and Chief Executive Officer's Report | | | | |
| For: | Discussion | | Decision | Information | X |

Purpose of the Paper: To provide Board Members with a brief overview of LEP's activities not reported elsewhere.

Summary of Recommendations: That Board Members note the content of the Report.

1. Executive Summary

Following the summer recess there has been a flurry of activity which impacts the LEP. The Comprehensive spending review which will cover the next three years is expected to be completed along with the Levelling up White Paper at the end of October. The results of the LEP review will either be reported separately or covered in the White paper.

We have continued to work closely with the LEP network and ME9 to position the LEPs and the important work they do. The focus of LEP Network campaign has most recently been skills and will move to Growth Hubs for the final week of September.

The Mid year review will be held next month and is focussed on the impact of the delay in paying LEPs their full allocation which is quite different from the format of meetings in previous years, that have focussed on governance, delivery and strategy. This financial position of the LEP will need to be discussed at the next board meeting as it's untenable to carry on using reserves at the current rate. By the next board meeting we should have a clearer view of the future of the LEPs, the next steps and the impacts of any changes to our funding. Our accounts for 20/21 are due to be completed in the coming weeks and the auditor will give a view on our status moving forward.

Following the Cabinet reshuffle the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government has now been renamed the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and is now headed up by Michael Gove who has previously been supportive of LEPs.

Simon Clarke has been appointed chief secretary to the treasury. Mr Clark was previously a Minister in the housing, communities and local government department responsible for LEPs.

Andy Haldane who was previously Chief Economist at the Bank of England and was the Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce has been appointed permanent secretary to the cabinet office. Andy was the keynote speaker at CWLEP's AGM last year so has a good knowledge of what LEPs do.

The LEP Network has already written to all the new ministers and is arranging briefings. We are all also encouraged to tag the new ministers in any social media posts about our activity to further help raise awareness.

Following a quiet summer for the Growth Hub which was impacted by the delays to receiving the funding, enquiries have increased but are more general now, with Covid and Brexit no longer featuring heavily amongst concerns.

Regarding delivery team members are busy contracting the recently approved allocations and ensuring LGF projects achieve their contracted outputs. With GBF there are some delivery concerns which will be covered during the meeting.

2. Marches LEP Ltd Annual Accounts and Audit report

The Marches LEP's Annual Accounts for financial year ended 31st March 2021 are currently being audited by James Holyoak & Parker Ltd, the LEP's appointed auditors.

Once the audit is complete, Board Members will be sent a copy of the Accounts by email and will be given the opportunity to raise comments. The Accounts will then be presented for approval at the LEP Annual General Meeting (AGM), which is currently being scheduled.

The initial intention was to have the Accounts ready for the September Board meeting. However, a setback in collating and finalising the required financial information has led to a delay.

3. Staffing

It is with regret that we have accepted Eden Ihle-Vance's resignation. Eden, whose role is the Careers Hub Lead will be leaving towards the end of October. We thank her very much for her work with the LEP and the support she's provided as the Careers Hub lead. We wish her every success in her new post.

As her post is funded from the Careers and Enterprise Company until August next year we will be going out to recruitment as soon as we can.

The contract of David Taylor who is the LEP's Enterprise Co-ordinator has been extended until the end of August in line with the funding provided for his post.

Gary Blackburn (project support officer) has been carrying out additional skills work to a higher level 2 days a week since early June for which he's been receiving additional pay. This agreement was due to end at the end of September. Due to the recruitment freeze, Gary has agreed to continue to act up, therefore the honorarium has been extended until the end of the financial year. The higher level skills post is costed in until the end of the year and we will not be in a position to go out to recruitment until we know the outcome of the LEP Review, therefore this doesn't represent a net increase in the LEP's operating costs.

4. PR & Marketing Activity Report for the Marches LEP, Marches Growth Hub (MGH) and Hereford Enterprise Zone (HEZ): June – August 2021

Campaign focus:

- Decade of Delivery – ten years of Marches LEP.
- LEPs Impact – ME9 campaign with Midlands LEPs.
- Business Support – including launch of Made Smarter, 1-2-1 adviser sessions, Export Peer Networks, Cluster support.
- Shell Store availability (office/meeting/conference).

Outputs and impact highlights:

- 48 separate pieces of media coverage, online and offline (11 offline coverage (8 local newspapers, 1 regional newspaper, 1 business magazine; 1 business newsletter); 35 online coverage; and 2 social coverage).
- Online and offline reach to a potential audience of 416.4k (322.7k online reach; 79.9k offline reach (53.5k local newspapers, 16.1k regional newspapers, 10.3k business newsletter); and 13.8k social reach).
- Positive tone to all media coverage, no negative coverage.

- Front page leads in print media, headline stories online and broadcast.
- Increase in follower numbers on all social media channels.
- Web hits: MGH 8,002 (down 20% on previous reporting period); MLEP 4,979 (down 13%); Skylon Park 2,400 (down 8%). All expected decreases during the main summer holiday period.
- Social media audiences across all platforms for MLEP, MGH, HEZ increased during the period although engagement was reduced.
- LEP's Decade of Delivery campaign secured prime placement in regional media and is being used by the LEP Network as part of its' #FutureValue campaign.
- Multiple offices have been let at the Shell Store following a campaign to promote including the production of a fly-through video and a new 360 tour.
- 132 companies in the Marches have been assisted through the Enhanced Export Growth Project which was promoted via the Marches LEP, Marches Growth Hub and Herefordshire Enterprise Zone channels.
- The Small Business Recovery Grant scheme, with PR led by the Marches LEP and promoted via the MGH, saw more than 200 companies successfully apply for a total of £547,000.

Looking forward:

A PR and marketing forward plan is being developed which will focus on the near future given the ongoing LEP Review. Pipeline activity includes the continuation of the Decade of Delivery, new campaigns focused on support available via MGH and impact case studies from HEZ investors.

5. Business Support

- The Marches Business Support (MBS) Steering Group met on 2 September 2021. Members received an update on Marches Growth Hub (MGH) activity plans for the remainder of 2021/22 using both the Marches LEP's Growth Hub funding allocated by BEIS and the local authorities' Additional Restrictions Grant.
- The MGH website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk has been reconfigured to aid user experience and content on local, regional and national support updated to ensure its relevance and accuracy. Additional intelligence on website usage is imminent as there is now functionality to capture business size, sector and local authority area information.
- A new MGH PR/marketing report detailing activity and impact is being designed by Be Bold with the support of the Marches LEP. The new report, measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and MGH PR/Marketing forward plan will be presented to the MBS Steering Group in December 2021.
- The West Midlands Growth Hub cluster is continuing to support regional activity and aid communication with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS).
- Promotion of new programmes, including Made Smarter, Help to Grow and Peer Networks is under way to encourage Marches businesses to participate. Some overlap between new BEIS funded national programmes and existing provision has been noted and care is being taken to ensure that businesses benefit from the most appropriate support.
- Further details of the planned Business Support Reform by BEIS are awaited alongside news of any future funding through LEPs for business support services.

6. Marches Careers Hub

- Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) funding for the period 1 September 2021 – 31 August 2022 has now been agreed. This funding is dependent on implementing a new strategic partnership delivery framework with the three local authorities, finalising a Strategic Plan to maximise local impact and redefining priorities across the Marches team to meet contract expectations.
- The Careers Hub has recently appointed 3 Community of Practice (CoP) Leads to roll out a pilot mentoring programme for schools' careers staff across the Hub. CoP Leads are volunteers drawn from existing and experienced school Careers Leaders. They work with the Careers Hub Lead to elevate practice by supporting Hub schools and colleges through peer coaching, mentoring and development activity.
- Work with Marches Cornerstone companies has continued, with CEC support, to encourage business engagement with schools and colleges.
- 5 Enterprise Advisers (business volunteers working with the strategic leadership teams in schools and colleges to support careers education) have been recruited following a local campaign. There are still opportunities for business people to get involved and more information on the role and recruitment process may be found here <https://enterpriseadviser.careersandenterprise.co.uk/becoming-an-enterprise-adviser/>

7. Midlands Rail Hub

The Marches LEP is encouraging local businesses to support the Midlands Rail Hub, a major infrastructure project which will see the electrification of the Birmingham to Shrewsbury Line. The scheme is expected to deliver on the Government's promise to level up the Midlands by putting in place a comprehensive series of measures that will create up to 24 extra passenger trains an hour and reduce journey times.

The Midlands Rail Hub will also create space for 36 extra freight paths a day, with the potential to move 4,320 lorries' worth of goods from the roads onto railways, reducing congestion and carbon emissions. The project will be a key element in achieving the aims of the Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan.

For the Marches, the Midlands Rail Hub is expected to bring several benefits to Hereford, including more frequent services from Hereford and Ledbury stations to Birmingham, Bromsgrove, Droitwich Spa, Great Malvern and Worcester. Hereford will also benefit from a reduced journey time to and from Birmingham, from 85 to 70 minutes.

£20m has been awarded by government to develop the business case. The Marches LEP support of the Rail Hub is contingent on investment being sought for the northern Marches to deliver the commitment to improve our rail journeys.

A draft letter urging the Government to fund the first stage of the Midlands Rail Hub, for those wishing to sign it, and a short information sheet are available by following the links below:

- [Midlands Rail Hub Case](#)
- [Midlands Rail Hub – Letter](#)

Financial implications: None

Legal implications: None

Risks, opportunities and impacts: None

Equality implications: None

Additional information/ attachments: None

Background papers/documents: None

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