

**Minutes of the Marches LEP Ltd Board Meeting
20 July 2021 at 4.00pm
Meeting held via Zoom
(Company Number: 11822614)**

Present:

Mandy Thorn MBE DL	MT	Chair, Marches LEP Board
Sonia Roberts	SR	Deputy Chair Marches LEP Board; Equality & Diversity Champion; CEO Landau Limited
Frank Myers MBE	FM	Herefordshire Business Board Chair
Beth Heath	BH	Shropshire Business Board Chair
Will Westley	WW	Telford Business Board Chair
Andrew Manning Cox	AMC	Hereford Enterprise Zone Chair
Cllr David Hitchiner	DH	Leader, Herefordshire Council
Cllr Ed Potter	EP	Portfolio Holder - Economic Growth, Regeneration & Planning, Shropshire Council
Cllr Shaun Davies	SD	Leader, Telford & Wrekin Council
Paul Kalinauckas	PK	Access to Finance Champion
Christine Snell	CS	Business Partner, AJ & CI Snell
Gordon Coppock	GC	Energy and NET Zero Champion

In Attendance:

James Walton	JW	Section 151 Officer, Shropshire Council
Roger Allonby	RA	Head of Economic Development, Herefordshire Council
Mark Barrow	MB	Executive Director for Place, Shropshire Council
Katherine Kynaston	KK	Director Housing Economy & Infrastructure, Telford & Wrekin Council
Ollie Hindle	OH	Assistant Director, West Midlands & South West, Cities & Local Growth Unit, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Nick Francis	NF	Deputy Head, West Midlands & South West, Cities & Local Growth Unit, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Annabelle Townley	AT	Deputy Area Lead, West Midlands & South West, Cities & Local Growth Unit, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (part of meeting)
Dave Courteen	DC	Chair, Marches Business Support Steering Group
James Dunn	JD	Director of Prosperity and Investment, Telford & Wrekin Council
Gill Hamer DL	GH	Chief Executive, Marches LEP
Ilia Bowles	IB	Director of Corporate Services, Marches LEP
Kathryn Jones	KJ	Partnership Manager, Marches LEP
Nick Alamanos	NA	Programme Manager, Marches LEP
Tim Yair	TY	Regional Senior Energy Projects Officer, Midlands Energy Hub
Ennis Vingoe	EV	Marches LEP Executive Assistant
Lisa Ashby	LA	Marches LEP Project Officer

Observers:

Jon Simcock	JS	Be Bold Ltd
Rachel Laver	RL	Chief Executive Elect, Marches LEP

ITEM		ACTION
1.	<p>1. Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest MT thanked everyone for attending the meeting and said that the planned face to face meeting at Ludlow Racecourse had been moved online due to a number of attendees having to self-isolate due to COVID-19. MT welcomed Will Westley, Cllr Ed Potter, Gordon Coppock, Rachel Laver, Dave Courteen and James Dunn to the meeting. Apologies were received from Catherine Baxter, James Staniforth and Sara Williams. Cllr Davies was attending in Cllr Wright's stead. MT noted that the meeting was being recorded to aid the production of the minutes.</p> <p>2. Declarations of Interest The Chair reminded members to complete the form that had been distributed for any specific Declarations of Interest for this meeting. WW declared an interest in Item 5 as a supplier of services to Marches Growth Hub - Telford.</p>	
2.	<p>Board Member Changes and Appointments MT said that as a company limited by guarantee director/Board member changes and appointments required formal confirmation. The following changes were discussed by the Board:</p> <p>a. Appointment of Public Sector Director, Shropshire Council – Cllr Lezley Picton The Board confirmed the appointment of Cllr Lezley Picton as a Public Sector Director of Marches LEP Ltd (unanimous).</p> <p>b. Appointment of Public Sector Alternate Director, Shropshire Council – Cllr Ed Potter The Board confirmed the appointment of Cllr Ed Potter as a Public Sector Alternate Director of Marches LEP Ltd (unanimous).</p> <p>c. Appointment of Private Sector Director as Chair of Telford Business Board - Will Westley The Board confirmed the appointment of Will Westley as a Private Sector Director of Marches LEP Ltd (unanimous).</p> <p>d. Resignation of Ruth Shepherd The Board noted the resignation of Ruth Shepherd</p> <p>e. Re-election of Sara Williams for a further 2-year term. The Board agreed that Sara Williams would be re-elected as a Private Sector Director.</p> <p>IB introduced GC as the co-opted Energy Champion. GC explained his role and said that he hoped the need for such a role would become redundant in the future when everyone was fully aware of the energy consequences of their decisions, the effect on greenhouse gas emissions, and how to balance them. MT said that she had attended the Midlands Connect Board meeting where the government's decarbonisation plan had been discussed. She said that there was a need to work collaboratively with the 3 Marches local authorities (LAs) and businesses to address the challenges, in particular around emissions from road use.</p>	
3.	<p>Minutes of the Marches LEP Ltd Board meeting held on 25 May 2021 The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2021 were approved by those members present at the meeting and would be signed (electronically) by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p>	EV
4.	<p>Telford Land Deal Board Update MT reminded members that the briefing note that had been circulated with the papers for this item was confidential.</p>	

	<p>JD gave a presentation covering the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Deal was a partnership between Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC), Homes England and the Marches LEP and had been in existence since 2016. • It allowed TWC to lead on the practical delivery of sites to the market. • TWC underwrites land values and forward funds infrastructure investment. • The LEP contributed £19m of Local Growth Funds for strategic infrastructure investment. • The TWC and LEP profit share was recycled to provide further outputs contributing to the Land Deal. • The Deal has allowed the evolution of a 'one stop shop' for in-house design, project management, ecology and fast track planning. <p>FM asked if the model could be replicated across Shropshire and Herefordshire. JD said that in Telford, the land was already available and up-front investment was key in order to make sites shovel-ready for investors.</p> <p>GP offered to discuss the Marches LEP's goal to achieve 50% renewable energy by 2030 with LAs outside the meeting.</p> <p>JD said that the market had changed with more distribution companies making enquiries to meet the increased demand. With regard to small/starter industrial units, they are rarely delivered by the private sector, so funding had been utilised from the profit share of the land deal to support delivery of small industrial units. This also released secondary stock to smaller businesses. MT thanked JD for his presentation and said that TWC had been shortlisted for the Council of the Year Award; the Land Deal was one of projects that had contributed to this.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Marches Growth Hub (MGH) 2020/21 Year-end Report</p> <p>DC gave a presentation which covered the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Marches Business Support Steering Group TORs were updated in January 2021 to reflect the changing economic and funding landscape. • Structure – the MGH comprises a virtual growth hub and website providing a wealth of information on business support services and an enquiry handling facility. Through investment by local authority partners and the University of Wolverhampton, there are three physical growth hubs situated in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford staffed by local authority teams. This investment enables a low-cost, high-return partnership model of delivery. • In 2020/21 30,277 business interactions took place through light touch, medium and high intensity growth hub support; 782 individuals were helped to start a business; and 13,980 referrals were made to partners including EU programmes (grants and loans), local authority business support and, where appropriate, private sector providers. • Across the three physical growth hubs, 235 virtual growth hub events had taken place with a total of 5,930 attendees of which 5,919 were businesses. • Funding – in 2020/21 MGH was funded by the Core Growth Hub grant funding of £205k; Supplementary Growth Hub grant funding allocation of £257k and Transition Business Readiness Grant funding allocation of £136k. In 2021/22 an allocation of £462k has been received. • Successes – case studies are available on the Marches Growth Hub website in the News section: https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/page/2/ • DC outlined the importance of working collaboratively and of a 'no wrong door' philosophy to ensure that businesses were able to access the support that they required. <p>SD questioned the impact on MGH delivery if local authority contributions needed to be reconsidered in light of budget challenges. KJ confirmed that, without this</p>	

	<p>support, a different operating model would have to be developed for MGH. BEIS are due to undertake a Business Support Reform project to review Growth Hubs across the country as these operate in different ways. BEIS is seeking a more consistent offer and there is also a move to delivery of more national programmes. The future structure and focus of Growth Hubs will be driven by the BEIS reform project, the outcome of the LEP Review and confirmation on successor funds to the EU programme which currently provides funding for in-depth and specialist business support.</p> <p>Members also discussed what evidence was available to show that the support was reaching the right audience. As detailed in the report, a significant amount of monitoring data is gathered by the MGH team as part of the BEIS contract and feedback from businesses was very positive. The challenges associated with engaging with micro and rural businesses, partly due to the geography of the Marches area, were acknowledged. However, moving support online over the last 14 months has had a positive effect on engaging additional businesses in different ways.</p> <p>SR would raise the issue of Growth Hub reliance on LA support as a potential risk at the next Performance Risk and Monitoring Committee (PRMC) meeting. A report on the profile of businesses engaging with the MGH would be developed and would be circulated to Board members.</p> <p>The Board noted the content of the report.</p>	<p>SR KJ</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Government Review of LEPs</p> <p>GH reported that the objectives of the LEP Review remained the same and that the LEP network working groups continued to meet to agree with civil servants the policies on funding, geography and representation.</p> <p>It was confirmed that LEPs had still not received the core funding for this financial year. NF said that he completely appreciated the frustration of the Board and could only apologise for the delay, however this would be resolved shortly as he was aware a resolution was relatively close. He would let MT and GH know as soon as he heard anything. MT re-emphasised the negative impact the uncertainty was having on the LEP staff. MT had written to all local MPs about the current changes and challenges and had received responses from some and had met with others. SR said that it was extremely frustrating and an appalling treatment of a body that had provided a very successful service over the past 10 years and that, as a Board member, she felt embarrassed by the whole situation. NF said that he understood the frustration and that things had become unavoidably political this year and because of the LEP Review, ministers were taking a much closer look at things. AMC asked about the potential winding up of Marches LEP Ltd and said that the Board would wish to be kept updated on the financial position. IB reported that discussions had taken place with the LEP's accountant and auditors and if the situation remained the same by September a review would be required of whether the LEP remained a "going concern" as a company, as it may not be in a position to meet its financial obligations next financial year. MT said that if there was still no clarity by the September Board meeting some difficult decisions would have to be made. WW said the message from the private sector was to put politics aside. In answer to questions about LEP geography MT said the discussions seemed to be more focussed around LEPs in the mayoral authorities and the definition of a 'functional economic geography'. MB said that maintaining the relationship between the public and private sector was crucial and potentially the relationship with partnerships in Wales.</p> <p>MT asked members to provide any further comments following the meeting.</p>	<p>All</p>

	The Board noted the content of the report.	
7.	<p>Local Growth Fund (LGF)</p> <p>7a. Project call</p> <p>NA went thought the decisions required by the Board regarding the reinvestment of returned LGF funds.</p> <p>DH asked for assurance that the agreements would be issued in a timely manner. NA brought Appendix 1 Project Call Flow Chart to members' attention and said that as the projects listed were existing projects through LGF funding, the contracts would be varied resulting in much shorter negotiation periods.</p> <p>In response to a query by SD, MT confirmed that all 3 LAs could bid for the returned LGF funds.</p> <p>MT reiterated the call would be for existing LGF funded projects that could spend money by end of this financial year or use freedom and flexibilities. MT asked that project promoters did not continually request contact revisions that would delay the final signing of them. The LEP required clarity over contract positions before funds were allocated.</p> <p>AMC declared an interest as Chair of HEZ and suggested that the proposal in the Flow Chart that from the week commencing 6 September 2021, "the LEP is to prepare funding variations/agreements", should also include "and agreements to be issued by <i>date</i>". MT agreed in principle but said that a significant amount of preparation work for this project call had already been undertaken by NA and his team in order to get things in place to move quickly depending on the Board's decision today, but that all partners would need to work collaboratively to ensure that contract positions were clear, and revisions were not required.</p> <p>GH emphasised the need for project promoters to make clear decisions on the contracts and put staffing resource and their own legal team resources into producing the relevant contract paperwork.</p> <p>SR suggested that funding should be halted to any projects that don't meet the deadlines in the contract and then allocated to another project in the pipeline</p> <p>MT said that an Emergency Board meeting would be required between 1-3 September 2021 in order to approve the recommended project list.</p> <p>The Board noted the background to the returned Local Growth Funds, as set out in section 1 of the paper and guidance and eligibility in relation to the use of returned Local Growth Funds, as set out in section 2 of the paper.</p> <p>The Board noted the LEP processes and procedures around developing new projects, as set out in section 3 of the paper.</p> <p>The Board rejected Option 1 and 2 in relation to the reinvestment of available LGF Funds, as set out in section 4.1 of the paper (unanimous).</p> <p>The Board approved Option 3, ensuring a robust project call was administered, with Projects creating additionality and value for money through returned LGF grant (unanimous).</p> <p>The Board approved the process for Option 3, as set out in Appendix 1, including Commissioning Group membership (unanimous).</p> <p>NA asked for volunteers from the Board for the Commissioning Group. MT asked interested Board members to contact GH and NA to volunteer within the next 24 hours if possible.</p>	<p>NA</p> <p>NA</p> <p>NA</p> <p>All</p>

	<p>7b. Skills Capital projects – outputs NA went through the sections in the paper. The Board noted the overachievement of Apprenticeship and New Learner outputs across the LGF Programme.</p> <p>The Board noted the outturn position in relation to individual projects, as set out in section 2.2 and Appendix 1 of the paper.</p> <p>The Board approved the recommendation to not extend Project Funding Agreements, as set out in section 3 (unanimous).</p>	NA
8.	<p>2021/22 Marches LEP Draft Delivery Plan IB introduced the document and said that it was a dynamic document that would inevitably require review following the outcome of the LEP Review. MT thanked IB for the considerable amount of work that had gone into producing the draft Delivery Plan The Board approved the draft Delivery Plan 2021/22 and noted that the plan was a dynamic document which would inevitably require updating once the outcomes of the LEP Review were known in Autumn 2021 (unanimous).</p>	
9.	<p>Report from Performance Risk & Monitoring Committee (PRMC) meeting on 25 June 2021 SR thanked IB and WR for all their support with PRMC and highlighted some areas in the report. SR suggested that it would be useful for Board members to meet to discuss the reshaping of the LEP for the Marches in light of the current LEP Review. The Chair and Deputy Chair would discuss and revert. MT thanked SJ and IB for the excellent report. The Board noted of the outcomes of the last PRMC meeting on 25 June 2021 and the main changes to the Strategic and Programme Risk Registers.</p>	IB
10.	<p>LEP Chair/CEO report GH drew members' attention to a summary report on the impact of LEP PR activity which would now be included for every Board meeting, and thanked members who had contacted the team regarding quotes to highlight LEP successes. MT reported that there had been further conversations between Midlands Connect and Sir Peter Hendy on the Union Connect Report, and he was aware that increased emphasis on cross border investment was required. The de-carbonisation plan and information on the impact of road trips on emissions would be circulated to Board members. The Board noted the contents of the report.</p>	EV
11.	<p>Any Other Business SD wished to formally record thanks from TWC to the LEP Board and MT as Chair for the support with the successful bid for the Towns Fund Bid. MT congratulated TWC on winning the award for Cooperative Council of the Year. MT thanked GH on behalf of the LEP Board for all her hard work over the past 6 years and for being an exemplary CEO.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Date of next meeting Emergency Meeting to allocate LGF – TBC Tuesday 28 September 2021</p>	



Signed (electronically): Mandy Thorn MBE DL, Chair Marches LEP

Date: 28 September 2021