

THE MARCHES LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP LIMITED					
BOARD MEETING					
Tuesday 21 March 2023			3.30 pm – 5.30 pm		
Shell Store, Canary Drive, Skylon Park, Hereford HR2 6SR					
AGENDA					
Item	Time		Lead	Purpose	Paper
1.	3.30 pm	Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest	SR		
2.	3.30pm	Governance - Director appointment and resignations	SR	Approval	X
3.	3.35pm	Minutes of The Marches LEP Ltd Board meeting on 24 January 2023 and any Matters Arising	SR		X
4.	3.35 pm	Presentation - Update on Hereford Enterprise Zone	Mark Pearce	Information	
5.	3.50pm	LEP Chair and CEO Report	SR/RL	Information & Discussion	X
6.	4.00pm	Report from the Performance Risk & Monitoring Committee (PRMC)	SR	Information	X
7.	4.05pm	Directors' Insurance	RL	Information	X
8.	4.10pm	23/24 Budget	RL	Approval	X
9.	4.15pm	Transport Officers Group - Initial list of five key Marches transport infrastructure projects	MS	Information & Discussion	X
10.	4.25pm	Presentation by Bouygues Energies & Services (online) - smart micro energy grids	Rory Langdon	Information	
11.	4.40pm	Strategy Updates to include Skills Advisory Panel and proposal for future strategic skills oversight.	RL KJ	Discussion & Approval	X
12.	5.50pm	LEP Network Update	SR	Discussion	
13.	5.05pm	Any Other Business	SR		
Future Meetings					
May 23	23 May 2023 3.30pm – 5.30pm (Ludlow Assembly Rooms)				
July 23	18 July 2023 3.30pm – 5.30pm (Ludlow Assembly Rooms)				

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Meeting date:	21 March 2023			
Agenda Item:	2			
Item Subject:	Governance			
Author:	Rachel Laver			
For:	Discussion		Decision	x
			Information	x

Purpose of the Paper:

To provide information to Board members regarding Board member changes and propose the confirmation of appointments of a new director of Marches LEP Ltd.

Summary of Recommendations:

- **To confirm the appointment of Gordon Coppock as a director of Marches LEP Ltd and full member of the Board.**
- **To note the resignation of Andrew Manning Cox and Catherine Baxter as members of the Marches LEP Board.**

Main points:

1. Board Member Appointment

Gordon Coppock (GC), Energy and Net Zero Champion has been a co-opted member of the Marches LEP Board since July 2021. GC has been invited to become a director of The Marches LEP Ltd and a full member of the Board.

In accordance with the Articles of Association section 20, members of the Board are asked to confirm the appointment of Gordon Coppock as a private sector director of Marches LEP Ltd. The necessary documentation will be filed with Companies House.

2. Resignation of Andrew Manning Cox and Catherine Baxter

Andrew Manning Cox (AMC) has been a member of the Marches LEP Board since January 2018 in his capacity as Chair of the Hereford Enterprise Zone (HEZ). AMC has come to the end of his tenure as the Chair of HEZ and has therefore tendered his resignation from the LEP Board.

Catherine Baxter (CB), Higher Education Champion has been a member of the LEP Board since March 2020. CB will soon be retiring from her role at Harper Adams University and has therefore tendered her resignation from the LEP Board.

The Board is asked to note that Andrew Manning Cox and Catherine Baxter have resigned from the Marches LEP Board with effect from the end of this meeting. The necessary notification will be made to Companies House. AMC and CB are thanked for their excellent service to the Marches LEP Board.

We are now recruiting for a replacement High Education representative for the Board. We would welcome any recommendations.

We are also currently in the process of recruiting two additional private sector members to the Business Support Steering Group to increase engagement with the private sector and the flow of intelligence. We have shortlisted applicants and will be meeting with candidates before the end of March.

Financial implications:

n/a

Legal implications:

The relevant director resignation and appointment documentation will be lodged with Companies House.

Risks, opportunities and impacts:

See below.

Equality implications:

The current national requirement for the proportion of female board members has risen this year from 30% to 50%. The current proportion of Board members is 36% female, 64% male. Recruitment for the new HE Champion is in progress.

Report Author: Rachel Laver

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**Draft Minutes of the Marches LEP Ltd Board Meeting
24 January 2023 at 3.30pm at Ludlow Racecourse
(Company Number: 11822614)**

Present:

Sonia Roberts	SR	Chair, Marches LEP
Will Westley	WW	Deputy Chair, Marches LEP & Telford Business Board Chair
Frank Myers MBE	FM	Herefordshire Business Board Chair (part of meeting)
Dave Courteen	DC	Marches Business Support Steering Group Chair (online)
Andrew Manning Cox	AMC	Hereford Enterprise Zone Chair (part of meeting)
Cllr David Hitchiner	DH	Leader, Herefordshire Council (part of meeting)
Cllr Dean Carroll	DCa roll	Portfolio Holder for Growth, Regeneration and Housing, Shropshire Council
Cllr Lee Carter	LC	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, Regeneration and the High Street, Telford & Wrekin Council
Gordon Coppock	GC	Energy and Net Zero Champion (part of meeting)
Christine Snell	CS	Business Partner, AJ & CI Snell (part of meeting)
Paul Kalinauckas	PK	Access to Finance Champion
Dr Catherine Baxter	CB	Higher Education Champion; University Secretary, Harper Adams University
Alex Green	AG	Director Radfield Homecare
Clare Fenton	CF	Director Fenton Partners & Veritherm (part of meeting)

In Attendance:

Ross Cook	RC	Director for Economy and Environment, Herefordshire Council (part of meeting)
James Walton	JW	Section 151 Officer, Shropshire Council (online)
Ben Jay	BJ	Assistant Director Finance & IT (Deputy Section 151 Officer) (online)
Mark Barrow	MB	Executive Director for Place, Shropshire Council (online)
Katherine Kynaston	KK	Director Housing Economy & Infrastructure, Telford & Wrekin Council
Rachel Laver	RL	Chief Executive, Marches LEP
Kathryn Jones	KJ	Head of Partnerships & Strategy, Marches LEP
Mark Schneider	MS	Head of Business Development & Delivery, Marches LEP
Ennis Vingoe	EV	Executive Assistant, Marches LEP
Jo Grivell	JG	Office Administrator, Marches LEP

ITEM		ACTION
1.	<p>Welcome</p> <p>1. Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</p> <p>SR thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Apologies were received from Graham Guest, Sara Williams and Alex Collins. Cllr Dean Carroll was attending in Cllr Lezley Picton's stead. SR also welcomed Dave Courteen who was attending his first meeting as a member of the Board.</p> <p>Due to a traffic incident a number of members would be late arriving at the meeting. SR confirmed that the meeting was currently quorate with 6 private sector members and 2 public sector members already in attendance (including one joining online). It was agreed that the meeting should commence.</p> <p>SR noted that the meeting was being recorded to aid the production of the minutes.</p> <p>2. Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The Chair reminded members to complete the form that had been distributed for any specific Declarations of Interest for every meeting.</p> <p>The following declarations of interest were made:</p>	

	<p>DCarroll - Item 7 Oxon Link Road presentation – as a member of Shropshire Council.</p>	
<p>2.</p>	<p>Minutes of The Marches LEP Ltd Board meeting on 29 November 2022 The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2022 were approved by those members present at the meeting and would be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting, subject to the following amendment proposed by KK from Telford & Wrekin Council: For Item 7: <i>The Board approved the output changes as detailed in the report including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>reference to New College in the Stronger Communities Grant allocation</i> • <i>para 4 in the report setting out the revised outputs (unanimous).</i> <p>Matters Arising Item 2 - Deputy Chair – following a brief discussion about the role of Deputy Chair, PK proposed that WW take up the role as Deputy Chair of the Marches LEP. WW confirmed that he was willing to accept the nomination which was then seconded by DCarroll. <i>Members present approved the appointment of WW as Deputy Chair of the Marches LEP (unanimous).</i></p> <p>Item 3 – the LEP had contacted Roger Allonby at Herefordshire Council to chase the outstanding information required by FM.</p>	<p>SR</p> <p>RC</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>LEP Chair and CEO Report SR highlighted some points from the report: Funding - information had still not been received from government regarding funding for the LEP and the Growth Hub but it was understood that a decision was expected at the end of January. Accountable Body Annual Audit – the LEP had received the audit report and the outcome for assurance was “good” with no recommendations made. Annual Performance Review – this would be taking place in February 2023.</p> <p>RL drew members’ particular attention to: Marches Energy Grant Scheme – following an interview with RL on Radio Shropshire promoting the scheme and a press release, there had been an overwhelming response. The number of enquiries in the few days following the promotion was larger than for the whole of the previous quarter. The contract for the project was close to being finalised with discussions being finalised with LAs over their contributions. Marches Growth Hub (MGH) – RL said that the LEP wanted to hear from businesses through business boards and the Marches Business Support Steering Group (MBSSG) regarding what support they needed, in order to shape provision through a potential recession. Key Account Management - LAs had confirmed that the centralised provision was now going well and hopefully there would be confirmation of funding for 23/24 soon.</p> <p>PK raised a point about potentially competing business support offers from LAs and how do businesses know where to go to. RL said there was cross referral, but the message needed to be reinforced that MGH was one of the main sources for support and signposting, and that it would help direct businesses to the most appropriate services and programmes regardless of whether the MGH was involved with the delivery of those programmes and services. There was a discussion regarding the duplication of evidence required by government.</p>	

	<p>DCarroll asked whether the Marches Careers Hub was funded under separate funding. KJ confirmed that the Careers Hub was currently funded by the Department for Education, via a contract between the Marches LEP and the Careers and Enterprise Company until the end of August 2023.</p> <p><i>Board members noted the content of the LEP Chair and CEO report.</i></p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Report from the Performance Risk & Monitoring Committee meeting held on 15 December 2023 SR referred members to the report. <i>Board members noted the content of the report.</i></p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Marches LEP 2023/24 Budget RL told the Board that a prudent budget had been presented showing that the LEP could meet all its costs in 2023/24. There were also reserves giving additional resilience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income of £100k a year from the Shell Store loan repayment. This wasn't shown in the budget as it was currently under a different cost centre to Core. • Over £1m remaining in the Marches Investment Fund. • £400k in Telford Land Deal monies. <p>There were some indications that there may be some government funding for LEP core funding for next year but at a lower level. The budget presented did not include this potential funding.</p> <p>RL said that savings had been made in the last 2 years in the LEP team structure, but it was not viable to reduce the team any further as it would leave no resilience in operations. A modest reduction of £10k in PR costs to £50k was suggested. Following a discussion about PR priorities and the potential use of a call-off contract, SR proposed that the tender for the PR and marketing contract for 23/24 would be on the basis of a call-off contract.</p> <p>KK confirmed that the next Telford Land Deal meeting was in March 2023 and that it was likely that the distribution of monies in 23/24 would be similar to this year.</p> <p>RL proposed that if the Board was content with the budget presented, the position would be discussed again at the next meeting when any government funding had been confirmed.</p> <p><i>The Board approved the draft Marches LEP Budget for 2023/24 and agreed that an update be brought to the next meeting when the funding position was confirmed (unanimous).</i></p>	<p>RL</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Board Member Fiduciary Responsibilities SR introduced Chris Harper (CH) from Bevan Brittan. CH went through the advice paper at Appendix 1 to the Board paper explaining the process that the LEP would go through should it need to be wound up. The process for a solvent company where 'members' started off the process of voluntary liquidation was that the directors assessed the nature of the company's debts and formed the opinion that it could meet its debts, within 12 months of commencement of the process. Directors would have to do this personally and with full enquiry.</p>	

	<p>CH referred to schedule 2 in the Appendix which listed the potential claims that could be brought against individual directors in the context of liquidation. He concluded that in Bevan Brittan’s view all of the potential claims listed would have some form of mitigation attached if directors were taking reasonable decisions, based on the most recent information available. This would avoid almost all liability. Directors were not guarantors and if they were prudent directors, it was difficult for the law to impose a liability on them. The directors of The Marches LEP Ltd understood the risks and the practical reality was that they dealt with problems as they arose.</p> <p>CH also covered directors’ insurance cover including the existing insurance in place for the directors of Marches LEP. The recommended period for “run-off” cover (for the period following when a director ceased to be a director) was 6 years. CH recommended that the LEP obtain the full wording of the existing cover provided for directors and the relative costs of extending the run-off period to 6 years.</p> <p>CH noted that the existing insurance cover for liability was £1m for all directors and officers. In the context of the LEP turnover of £1.7m, it was felt that significant claims in terms of number and amount, would be unlikely.</p> <p>It was agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The full wording of the directors’ insurance would be passed to members; • The LEP would meet with the brokers to confirm there was a sufficient level of cover provided including run-off insurance, and; • The LEP would produce a summary of potential risks in the context of the nature of the LEP business and its current trading position. <p>Members discussed whether, in the event of the company being wound up, surplus monies would remain in the Marches rather than being clawed back by government. BJ suggested that it would be unlikely that the monies would be clawed back as the projects would not be in breach of contract. They would be required to continue to produce the outputs contracted for; and the LEP would have performed its duties as required.</p> <p>It was also noted that it was important to ensure that funding continued to be ringfenced for LEP staff.</p> <p><i>Members of the Board noted the content of the report.</i></p>	<p>RL</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Oxon Link Road – presentation by Matt Johnson (MJ), Shropshire Council</p> <p>SR welcomed MJ to the meeting who provided an update on the risks/mitigations and opportunities associated with the Oxon Link Road project. Shropshire Council was continuing to provide output information and would continue to share information with PRMC and the LEP Board on progress made with the Full Business Case and planning.</p> <p>Members asked a number of questions and MJ confirmed that the other element of the project, the Northwest Relief Road was funded by the Department for Transport.</p> <p>RL said that the Board needed to be confident that the Oxon Link Road scheme remained affordable and deliverable, and MJ had been asked to provide an update to the Board in the context of the inflationary increases in costs, and concerns regarding planning. MJ said that the Council had now completed the planning submission which addressed all the outstanding concerns with the Environment</p>	

	<p>Agency, Natural England and Severn Trent Water, with a full external legal review of the submission by national specialists.</p> <p>The Full Business Case would be brought to the PRMC and the LEP Board in due course.</p>	MJ
8.	<p>Board discussion about future priorities of the LEP</p> <p>SR set the context for a discussion looking at what the LEP future priorities could be should the funding be available. Members made a number of suggestions including:</p> <p>FM – could some funds be made available for support to mitigate cost escalation for projects within the Stronger Towns Fund.</p> <p>GC – electrical grid improvements across the Marches (CS concurred).</p> <p>PK – Access to Finance – providing small amounts of loan funding to businesses to help them lever more money from other sources.</p> <p>CF – many SMEs with innovative products were excluded from LA funding calls because they did not fulfil the standards in the call. KK asked CF to link with her regarding this. Case studies were needed to highlight the value of innovative approaches. SR said that the LEP could help with links into LAs too.</p> <p>DCarroll – suggested that the LEP could assist LAs by promoting support for business case development; or providing R&D funds so that projects were then ready as ‘off the shelf’ or ‘shovel ready’ to be presented for short-term funding rounds.</p> <p>FM – asked if the SMEs in the Marches were getting the same support as others in Malvern for an accelerator-type programme for instance? Was the offer the same across LEP areas and should we be replicating anything that was missing?</p> <p>SR – much of this was about supporting innovation in smaller businesses.</p> <p>RL – perhaps setting up a business case development fund. Many SMEs were being precluded from bidding opportunities and perhaps the LEP could provide training in bid writing and applying for grant funding.</p> <p>KK – the one-to-one consultancy support funding provided by the LEP had been really beneficial.</p> <p>SR thanked everyone for their contributions. The team would review and feedback on the viability of the options.</p>	<p>CF</p> <p>LEP Team</p>
9.	<p>Marches Growth Deal Update</p> <p>RL reported that the LEP was in discussion with the 3 LAs around devolution-type cross-area collaboration, including exploring the potential and viability of working with authorities in Wales for instance. The group was trying to refine the suggested options as the Marches area was losing the opportunity to successfully bid for large scale, strategic funding by not working together. A list of suggested priorities had been circulated between the 3 LAs. Work was continuing at director level.</p>	
10.	<p>Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) Update</p> <p>KJ thanked everyone that attended the SEP update working group in December, and AG for his support with a recent care sector meeting.</p> <p>A document would be produced that outlined the challenges and opportunities in the Marches area. An initial data set was being worked on which would help to build understanding and capacity for partners.</p> <p>The LEP had commissioned some additional work around the transport consultancy work and a land use study. The timeline for issue of the updated SEP would be delayed slightly in order to build in the learning from these studies. There were still lots of opportunities for partners to get involved.</p> <p>Board members noted the content of the report, progress made, and next steps being undertaken.</p>	

<p>11.</p>	<p>Transport Officers Group Update MS reported that a sub-group of the 3 Marches LAs plus Ceredigion Council had been created to work with the transport consultants (Aecom) to ensure the work was completed before the end of March 2023. The intention was to identify an initial list of 5 key transport infrastructure projects with opportunities to bid for relatively short-term funding ie over the next 5 years. Members discussed a number of potential projects and GC asked that the group engage with the Hereford transport group. RC would ensure that the Herefordshire Council rep on the TOG was aware of this.</p> <p>MS said that the list of projects would be brought to the next Board Meeting.</p> <p><i>Board members noted the content of the report.</i></p>	<p>RC</p> <p>MS</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p>Any Other Business SR said that CB's last Board meeting would be March 2023. She asked members to forward any suggestions for a replacement HE representative on the Board to the LEP Team.</p> <p>Next Board meeting location – this would be in Hereford to view the Shell Store and new NMITE buildings. RL asked members to confirm if they would be able to attend the meeting in person at the Shell Store.</p>	<p>All</p> <p>All/EV</p>
<p>Next Meeting: 21 March 2023 from 3.30pm to 5.30pm at the Shell Store, Canary Drive, Skylon Park, Hereford HR2 6SR</p>		

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Item 4 – Update on Hereford Enterprise Zone - presentation

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Meeting date:	21 March 2023				
Agenda Item:	5				
Item Subject:	Marches LEP Chair and Chief Executive Officer's Report				
For:	Discussion	X	Decision	Information	X

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

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

1. Executive Summary

Since the last Board meeting we have received confirmation of core funding for 23/24, which has been set at £250k, a reduction of a third from last year. We also have now received confirmation that we will receive Growth Hub, Careers Hub and Key Account Management funding but not how much for each initiative. It is very disappointing to see the reduction in core funding and how this has been perceived by stakeholders, but LEPs clearly do still have role to play and work to do over the next 12 months. Following the budget we know that government will be withdrawing its support from April 2024. We'll now be concentrating on developing our business plan and looking at how best we can add value over the coming 12 months. We'll also be looking at pursuing new opportunities like Skills Bootcamps which LEPs are being encouraged to bid to run.

The Careers Hub has been very active over recent weeks with National Apprenticeships and National Careers week both taking place. The Hub has also been able to secure funding to run a pilot project, targeting 30 students most at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and will begin next month.

The revised Key Account Management service is performing well and continues to have good feedback from what is now the Department for Business and Trade.

The capital programmes continue to be monitored by the LEP team and the Performance Monitoring and Risk Committee (PRMC) and there are currently no significant concerns.

Skills Advisory Panel funding ends this year so there is no longer a requirement to have a panel. It is important that we continue to support skills work but not duplicate the work of the Employer Representative Body and build on the findings of the Local Skills Improvement Plan. There is strong support from the local colleges for the LEP to continue to have a role in co-ordinating and influencing this work, so we are suggesting that we form a Marches Strategic Skills and Employment Group, which is covered in a separate paper.

2. Finance

The core funding announced will only meet 30% of the operating costs of the company, however with funding carried forward and other income expected this year the LEP will continue to be able to meet operating costs for the next 12 months.

The LEP has enough reserves to cashflow the core funding, Growth Hub, and KAM funding streams until it's received but it is not ideal. We will continue to petition for early payments of funds as delivery will start from 1st April.

The year's accounts will be finalised during April, but projected expenditure shows that operating costs will be the lowest they have been for four years, reflecting the sustained effort to reduce costs.

Copy of cashflow forecast is included at Appendix 1.

3. Governance

The Annual Performance Review (APR) process has been completed and no issues have been raised.

4. PR & Marketing Activity Report for the Marches LEP and Marches Growth Hub (MGH)

Given uncertainty about priorities for the LEP and whether we would get Growth Hub funding we have reduced expenditure on PR. We have also put on hold the re-procurement of the PR services as it was unclear how much PR we would have to do next year. We have moved BeBold on to a call off contract and will indicate month by month how much we intend to spend on PR. When we know how much funding we will get for the Growth Hub and KAM we can look at running a procurement process.

However, PR work has continued and the Growth Hub has seen an 86% increase in visitors to the website, mainly as a result of promotion of the Marches Energy Grant Scheme and two campaigns, "Finance your Business" and "Build your Business". We've altered the branding to make it clearer that the Marches Growth Hub is part of the LEP and vice versa.

The PR and Marketing update is included in Appendix 2.

5. Strategy development

Drafting of the update Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) has continued and Appendix 3 contains the updated draft evidence base. This is a 'live' document that will be updated to reflect new data sets as these are released. The final version will be formatted to reflect LEP house style and will include additional Marches images.

The SEP will also reflect the priorities being determined by the Marches LEP funded external transport consultancy being carried out by AECOM (being managed by the Transport Officers' Group) and the land use study (being managed by the Marches LEP and support by the Marches Nature Partnership) which is being undertaken by TACP.

To support the work of the Energy Steering Group, it is proposed that the Marches LEP commissions a consultant to develop a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP). The brief for this assignment has been drafted. Feedback is being sought from Energy Steering Group members in order to finalise this and ensure that it adds value to other work being undertaken across the Marches.

Discussions on cross-border collaboration and opportunities for alignment are continuing through TOG. The Marches LEP team are due to meet the Growing Mid Wales team on 17 March 2023 to learn more about implementation of the Mid Wales Growth Deal and current shared economic priorities.

We will need to draft our delivery plan for 23/24 which hasn't been possible to date with lack of clarity about funding. We will concentrate on developing new opportunities that support economic development across the Marches and complement the work local authorities are

doing. We will also continue to support discussions about partnership working and exploring devolution options to the extent that there is a desire for the LEP to be involved.

We chair the LEP rural group so are working with other LEPs to raise the profile of challenges faced by rural areas and break down stereotypes. Typically, only 4% of a rural economy is farming and over 50% is manufacturing. We know that skills shortages are often exacerbated in rural areas due to transport issues. We are doing some work with NICRE (National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise) to see if we can identify gaps in business data, look at sharing best practice and highlight the needs of and opportunities of rural areas to business.

6. Programmes

All programmes continue to be closely monitored by the LEP staff with overview from the Programme Monitoring and Risk Committee. There are 2 projects with grant funding left to spend before the end of the Q4, Herefordshire City Centre Improvements (HCCI) with £621,100 and Stronger Communities with £93,004. Both projects are confident that they will achieve their contracted spend.

Despite agreeing to meet the initial operating costs of the Marches Energy Grant scheme, the grant agreement isn't yet signed as we're still waiting for confirmation from one of the councils of the Shared Prosperity Fund contribution. However, following the overwhelming response to the launch of the fund, the energy audits have started using remaining Business Energy Efficiency Funding (BEEP) and Herefordshire's '30 for 2030' funding. We hope the agreement will be finally signed by the end of the month to enable the capital funding to flow to businesses.

The University of Wolverhampton has had its VAT status changed which now means that they have to repay £114k to the LEP. We are in discussions with the Cities and Local Growth Unit about how to treat this funding. If we're allowed to keep it, one option would be to top up the Marches Energy Grant fund which is likely to be significantly over subscribed.

7. Business Support

7.1. Marches Growth Hub

It is very pleasing to see that Growth Hub funding will continue given how well the brand is known across the Marches now. We have continued to promote different funds available such as the Business Growth Programme and Small Equipment Grant, which have both received strong levels on interest, helping businesses across the Marches to access these funds and ensure all the funding is fully spent.

The LEP/Growth Hub is co-sponsoring an event at RAF Museum Midlands at Cosford on 24th March. This event is aimed at promoting Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) and increasing applications from Marches businesses.

We attended the Race to a Trillion event on 1 March 2023 which highlighted business growth opportunities associated with international trade and export. It outlined support available including the Export Support Service offering a one-stop shop for exporting advice, the UK Export Academy for new to export businesses and the launch of a new UK Tradeshow Programme.

All DBT services will continue to be promoted through the Marches Growth Hub website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk to increase take up by Marches businesses.

7.2. Department for Business and Trade (DBT) – Key Account Management (KAM)

The project remains on track to achieve its targets through the new delivery model was adopted for 2022/23. This has proved to be more effective in meeting DBT's contractual requirements whilst adding value to the account management work carried out by the local authority economic development teams.

The 2022/23 programme is currently supporting 30 foreign-owned businesses across the Marches and has logged 15 identified investment projects. Two of these have now been formally verified as wins by DBT against our target of five. The most recent win is a Herefordshire-based, Belgian-owned company which has invested £1.1m invested in a new production line at its site on Ross-on-Wye, including investment in an improved heating system, LED lighting and more efficient ventilation to contribute to a reduction in its carbon footprint.

Funding for 2023/24 has been agreed in principle by HM Treasury. Information on the level of funding and the business case process is awaited from DBT.

8. Skills and Labour Market Support

8.1. Department for Education (DfE) - Marches Skills Advisory Panel (SAP)

As previously advised, DfE's grant of £55k to support the operation and data analysis function of the Marches Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) will be the final strand of funding. This reflects the shift to the Employer Representative Body (ERB)'s remit to compile, publish and roll-out a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the Marches.

The SAP continues to update relevant skills and employment data, including that mandated by DfE. This has included funding licences for the LEP, ERB, 3 x local authorities, 3 x FE colleges and the Marches Skills Provider Network for the Lightcast tool. This enables partners to access economic and vacancy trend data to shape local provision. Due to the cessation of SAP funding, no extension will be possible beyond the current licences which are in place until mid-July 2023.

Agenda item 11 outlines our plans on how the LEP can continue to contribute to and maintain a strategic overview of the skills agenda recognising its vital link to the inclusive economic growth agenda.

8.2. Employer Representative Body (ERB) and Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The LEP continues to provide support to the ERB (Shropshire Chamber) in its development of the LSIP and is a member of the ERB board. We continue to actively encourage the business community to engage with the ERB to highlight their skills needs and hosted a session for Marches Careers Hub Enterprise Advisers (EAs – business volunteers) to articulate the importance of good careers education in highlighting local employment opportunities.

As noted earlier, a proportion of SAP funding has funded Lightcast licences for the ERB. In addition, SAP funding has been allocated towards the Chamber's Beauhurst licences to

enhance the ERB's evidence base of key employers across the Marches and enable effective stakeholder engagement.

8.3. Marches Careers Hub

The Marches Careers Hub continues to make progress in supporting schools and colleges to provide meaningful careers education to young people. The Marches Careers Hub Steering Group met on 14 February 2023 and members were updated on plans for the Spring Term. These include:

- A focus on briefing schools on best practice approaches to meet new changes to the Provider Access Legislation, which include facilitating encounters for young people with providers of technical and vocational pathways.
- Successfully securing additional funding from University of Wolverhampton's Aspire to HE programme to pilot an early intervention project in Telford. This project is targeting 30 students most at risk of becoming NEET. The pilot will begin in April 2023 and provides a great opportunity to identify effective strategies to reduce NEET figures.
- Raising the profile of the Hub through enhanced partnership working:
 - On 7 February 2023 it co-sponsored the Shropshire Apprenticeship show which attracted over 260 school/college attendees from over 30 institutions.
 - On 16 March 2023, the Marches Careers Hub will be in attendance as co-sponsors at the Telford and Wrekin Apprenticeship, Employment and Skills show where local businesses from Shropshire & Telford will be exhibiting to promote vacancies and their business sectors. 1,500 young people are currently registered to attend. This will be a great opportunity for the Careers Hub to engage with employers to join our Enterprise Adviser Network and 'Give an Hour' campaign.
 - For National Apprenticeships Week (6 – 12 February 2023), the Hub worked with employers to develop a live broadcast promoting local apprenticeships. This event was watched live by 5,497 individuals. We also launched apprenticeship resources for teachers, parents, and young people to challenge myths and provide a clear understanding of these pathways.
 - During National Careers Week (6 – 11 March 2023), the Hub launched new resources for schools and colleges outlining opportunities for green skills within the Marches. A Learn Live broadcast on 7 March 2023 was also hosted where local employers discussed their businesses and what they look for when recruiting. This broadcast was watched live by 5,166 individuals and is available on demand.
 - Funding has been reserved to co-sponsor a similar event in Herefordshire when advised by Herefordshire Council.

The Marches Careers Hub's programme of Careers Leader Community of Practice events providing support, CPD, resources and the opportunity for networking have continued. In addition, Enterprise Adviser Community of Practice Meetings have been delivered to support these business volunteers through the provision of resources and to facilitate

networking. Their meeting on 8 March 2023 concentrated on T levels and the session was led by Shrewsbury Colleges Group.

Funding for the new contract period (1 September 2023 – 31 August 2024) is pending formal agreement between DfE and CEC. Initial communication from the CEC suggests a reduction in funding available to the Marches – the implications of this on project staffing will be considered when the funding allocation has been confirmed.

Background papers/documents:

Appendix 1 – [LEP Cashflow Forecast Feb 23](#)

Appendix 2 - [PR & Marketing Report](#)

Appendix 3 - [The Marches SEP Evidence Base 2023](#)

Report Authors:

Sonia Roberts, Marches LEP Chair and Rachel Laver, Marches LEP CEO

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Meeting date:	21 March 2023				
Agenda Item:	6				
Item Subject:	Report from the Performance Risk & Monitoring Committee meeting on 16 February 2023				
For:	Discussion		Decision		Information X

Purpose of the Paper: To report on the PRMC meeting on 16 February 2023 and highlight the main changes to the Corporate and Programme Risk Registers.					
Summary of Recommendations: Board members are asked to: Note the outcomes of the last PRMC meeting.					
1. Summary of PRMC meeting held on the 16 February 2023 The minutes of the meeting are attached to this paper. Specific matters that we'd like to draw the Board's attention to are: a. Risk Registers The risk registers were reviewed. The highest corporate risk continues to be funding for the LEP. Although core funding of £250k has been confirmed this is a further large reduction on the previous year's settlement of £375k. The highest risk on the programme risk register remains the lack of clarity around government funding for the Growth Hub for 2023-24. The Oxon Link Road also continues to be a high risk, however the risks associated with other projects, Pride Hill, ICW and HCCI have reduced. The risk reduction for Pride Hill was a result of a contract variation and for the remaining projects it was due the achievement of contracted spend profiles. A new risk associated with failure to capture project contracted outputs has been identified. This was linked to the change in staff at the LEP and the impact this has had on the monitoring of projects and also the failure of applicants to regularly report now the funding has been spent. To mitigate this, monitoring of all LGF and GBF projects will be undertaken, with meetings arranged with applicants as necessary to ensure contracted outputs are achieved.					
b. Integrated Wetlands There was an excellent presentation by Ben Boswell from Herefordshire Council on the progress of the project which is really innovative. WE would like to work with Herefordshire Council to promote the project nationally.					
c. Marches Energy Grants The Marches Energy Grant scheme was launched in January, and it resulted in more enquiries received through the website in two days, compared with the previous three months.					
Financial implications: None					
Legal implications: None					
Risks, opportunities and impacts: n/a					
Equality implications: None					
Additional information/ attachments: Appendix 1 LEP Corporate Risk Register 16 Feb 2023 Appendix 2 LEP Programme Risk Register 16 Feb 2023					
Report Author: Mark Schneider, Marches LEP Head of Business Development & Delivery					

**Minutes of the Marches LEP Performance, Risk & Monitoring Committee (PRMC)
Thursday 16 February 2023**

Present

Sonia Roberts (Chair)	SR	Deputy Chair of the Marches LEP Board
Alex Green	AG	Marches LEP Board Member
Clare Fenton	CF	Marches LEP Board Member
Sara Williams	SW	Marches LEP Board Member
James Walton	JW	Section 151 Officer, Shropshire Council
Ben Jay	BJ	Shropshire Council AD Finance & ICT
Karen Morris	KM	Deputy nominated by Section 151 Officer, Herefordshire Council
Dainy Runton	KM	Deputy nominated by Section 151 Officer, Telford & Wrekin Council
Rachel Laver	RL	Marches LEP Chief Executive
Mark Schneider	MS	Marches LEP Head of Business Development and Delivery
Kathryn Jones	KJ	Marches LEP Head of Partnerships and Strategy
Jo Grivell	JG	Marches LEP Office Administrator
Govin Aujla	GA	Area Lead, Cities & Local Growth Unit
Alex Collins	AC	Deputy Area Lead, Cities & Local Growth Unit
Ben Boswell	BB	Herefordshire Council – Integrated Wetlands Programme

ITEM		ACTION
1	<p>Welcome, apologies and introductions The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mark Schneider was introduced, who joined the LEP in January 2023 as Head of Business Development and Delivery. Govin Aujla was also introduced as the new Area Lead, for Cities & Local Growth Unit. RL thanked Alex Collins for all his help and support while covering the Area Lead role. Apologies were received from Ken Clarke, Andrew Lovegrove, and Frank Myers.</p> <p>Declarations of interest There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
2	<p>Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising The minutes of the last meeting on 15 December 2022 were reviewed, checked for accuracy, and approved as an accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>All actions were addressed with exception:</p> <p>The Project Officer had been tasked with visiting each of the projects to see that the projects are physically complete and to capture all their output and match information. MS will now complete this action over the coming months.</p> <p>AC to confirm if there is going to be any requirement to count outputs past the programme deadlines i.e. 2025.</p>	<p align="center">MS</p> <p align="center">AC</p>
3	<p>Marches LEP Update RL gave the following update: The LEP's core funding has been reduced from £375,000 to £250,000 for 2023-24. The VAT due to be paid by the</p>	

	<p>LEP on its activities will be approximately £140,000 so in effect the net income from Government is only £110,000 which limits what the LEP can deliver for the Marches.</p> <p>RL stressed to GA that there needs to be a very clear mandate from Government regarding what it expects of the LEP. The Government has been clear about expectation about devolution but lots of LEPs operate across areas where there isn't a clear consensus and appetite for a devolution deal. Therefore what is the expected role for LEPs in these circumstances. If there is additional funding available then the LEPs need to be made aware and be eligible to bid for the work. There is still no news on Growth Hub funding with 6 weeks to go to year end which is very unsettling especially for staff are on contracts that only run to end of March.</p> <p>The current public lack of ministerial support for LEPs is significantly damaging and ministers need to back LEPs if they want to retain them and the value of a strong independent business voice. In the absence of that backing or a clear mandate, then they need to be clear on the future role of LEPs. This lack of direction is impacting on local business leaders who give their time, and the ongoing lack of any decision on Growth Hub funding is adding to their frustrations, as LEP officers continue worry about their future.</p> <p>AC reassured the group that he is feeding all the comments into the centre.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Top 5 Risk Registers</p> <p>MS gave an update on the exercise to consolidate all the risks as there was some duplication. The focus of the updates will be on Top Risks and any new or changed risks.</p> <p>A) Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>No change to the top corporate risks as they mainly relate to the same topic regarding the uncertainty of LEPs and funding.</p> <p>A new risk has been listed related to the financial risk/liability to directors if the LEP should be wound up. Funding for run off cover insurance has been ringfenced for the next 6 years to manage this risk.</p> <p>SR highlighted a risk on staff contracts which are extended year on year. Contracts for 2023-24 have been extended in the knowledge that there is money to cover it but that will not be possible in 2024-25 as the LEP will no longer have sufficient reserves. In the event of contracts being extended and no funding coming through the LEP is still liable to pay for that year term dependent on their length of service. Additionally staff are likely to seek employment elsewhere as there is no assurance past March 2024 which could limit the ability to operate effectively. The consultation process will start in October 2023, unless funding for 24/25 is agreed before then.</p> <p>B) Programme Risk Register</p> <p>The top risks relate to Oxon Link Road, where the funding has been spent but the project not yet completed, the lack of clarity on funding for the</p>	

	<p>Growth Hub and reduced capacity in the LEP team also tied to lack of funding.</p> <p>The remaining risk ratings related to the following projects: Wetlands, HCCI and Pride Hill have all gone down. Details of the risks can be found here.</p> <p>A new risk has been identified related to management of projects, due to the absence of project staff managing the projects and any potential loss of corporate knowledge in the team. A review of the projects is under way by MS to address this.</p> <p>SR clarified that all the projects identified as risks are scrutinised by the PRMC as part of the Forward Plan. The plan sets out the timetable for the projects to provide updates throughout the year.</p>	
5	<p>Integrated Wetlands update Ben Boswell, Head of Environment, Climate and Waste at Herefordshire Council gave a really informative presentation and general overview of the Wetlands programme.</p> <p>Herefordshire Council is creating a number of Integrated Wetlands specifically for the purpose of removing phosphates before they reach the local rivers, which will enable the ban on further land development in some areas to be lifted. The phosphate credit system allows developers to buy credits generated by the operation of the wetlands to offset the phosphates that their new developments will create.</p> <p>Three sites have now been purchased for wetlands, and a fourth site is being pursued. The Wetlands project is ground breaking and now is best practice for the development of wetlands. The project is on track to deliver against its budget.</p> <p>RL asked about progress on outputs for jobs and houses. BB advised the first site developed will unlock several hundred houses but the timeline for delivering all the outputs will depend on the amount of developments put forward and planning approval. Once developments are approved and work commences it will create the associated jobs.</p> <p>SR asked for more definitive details of the pipeline of outputs. BB agreed to provide.</p>	BB/RJ
6	<p>Performance monitoring – Exceptions</p> <p>a) Growth Deal Update and b) Getting Building Fund update MS provided a summary of the projects. The majority have spent their funding, but none have completed their match funding with exception of Tackling Fuel Poverty. There is no concern as such, but the LEP needs to continue to track that outputs are being achieved. An audit is underway of all projects where any issues regarding outputs can be discussed.</p> <p>b) Growth Hub Update RL thanked Jo Grivell who has been covering the Growth Hub in addition to</p>	

	<p>her role as LEP Office Administrator, while a member of staff is off sick.</p> <p>With six weeks to go to the end of the year there is no sight of whether there will be funding for the Growth Hub for 23/24 which is incredibly frustrating. It makes it difficult to plan and to manage contracts for CRM licences etc. used by the Growth Hubs. If the Growth Hub does not get funding the LEP would have to pick up the costs of any contracts that extend into year 2023-24.</p> <p>Given the lack of funding the team is considering what it can deliver going forward. This needs to be balanced with other LEP activities and where the LEP will have the maximum impact.</p> <p>RL reiterated to GA/AC that it was a frustrating position to be in given the Growth Hub brand has become embedded in the business community across the Marches. It is their first port of call for advice and support. It would be a shame if all the time, effort and public money used to build the brand goes to waste especially when businesses most need it.</p> <p>A joint event with Midlands Engine Investment Fund is being held at RAF Cosford on Friday 24th March. This is in response to the fact that MEIF is undersubscribed in the Marches compared with other areas and more needs to be done to maximise uptake. Details of the event are here: How finance can help your business fly - Marches Growth Hub</p> <p>c) Energy Projects RL gave the following update: The Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire Green Skills project is going full steam ahead. The contract has been signed.</p> <p>The contract has also been signed with National Grid for the EA Technology and National Grid monitor project. Still in the process of deciding where the monitors will be placed as we want them to be where they will have the biggest impact.</p> <p>Marches Energy Grant scheme was launched in January, and it resulted in more enquiries received through the website in two days, compared with the previous three months. This sends a clear message that there is huge demand for this type of support. The contract with Worcestershire Council to administer the scheme is yet to be signed.</p> <p>d) Key Account Management The contract with Department for International Trade (DIT) is in place until the end of the financial year. The target of working with 30 companies has been reached. Fifteen projects have been identified and one project has been completed against a target of five. Funding for next year is still not determined.</p> <p>e) Skills Support (SAP/Marches Careers Hub) The LEP continues to work with the Employer Representative Body (ERB) to support the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). Department for Education has confirmed there will be no further funding for this work.</p>	
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	<p>There is funding in place until the end of August 2023 for the Marches Careers Hub project and discussion on funding from September has commenced with the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC). Early indications are that there will be slightly less funding than in previous years.</p> <p>RL highlighted an issue that some of the funding streams work to different financial years/funding periods. If the LEP is awarded future Careers Hub funding this would run past the end of 2023-24 financial year when the current Core Funding and reserves held by the LEP could be fully committed.</p> <p>A decision will need to be made in conjunction with the Accountable Body whether the contract could be accepted.</p>	
7	<p>Midlands Connect Transport Summit Update RL gave a brief update on the summit which helped highlight transport issues in the Marches. Many local MPs attended and contributed to the discussion, and it was a very positive event. The LEP will continue to fly the flag for major transport improvement schemes across the Marches.</p>	
8	<p>Any other business SR thanked Alex Collins for all his support whilst deputising for the Area Lead.</p>	
	Next Meeting of the Marches LEP PRMC: 27 April 2023 14:00-15:30	

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Meeting date:	21 st March 2023				
Agenda Item:	7				
Item Subject:	Directors' Insurance				
For:	Discussion		Decision		Information x

<p>Purpose of the Paper: To provide detail of the Directors' insurance</p>
<p>Summary of Recommendations: To note the contents of the report and the ring fencing of funding to cover Run Off Insurance costs for the period of 6 years after the LEP closes.</p>
<p>Main points Following discussions at the Board and a presentation from Bevan Brittan we have met with the insurance brokers and checked whether the insurance in place is adequate and appropriate, and we discussed the need for run off insurance.</p> <p>The Directors insurance currently in place covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal expenses but not fines. • Inter company insurance- in the case of having to sue another director for fraud. • Unintentional accounting and tax errors. <p>The insurance understandably doesn't cover fraud.</p> <p>Run off insurance is only needed when a company winds up and is required for a period of 6 years. It is paid on a reducing premium every year from the first year. We have now ringfenced a budget for insurance and for the accountable body to manage the administration of this should the LEP be wound up.</p> <p>We discussed the current activity of the LEP and the broker felt that the current insurance in place was adequate.</p>
<p>Financial implications: We will need to ringfence £12k to meet the total costs of Run off Insurance for a period of 6 years should the LEP close. We will also have to ensure there is a ringfenced budget for the accountable body to carry out any legacy tasks associated with the LEP.</p>
<p>Legal implications: n/a</p>
<p>Risks, opportunities and impacts: There is a risk to the directors if appropriate insurance isn't in place.</p>
<p>Equality implications: n/a</p>
<p>Report Author: Rachel Laver</p>

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Meeting date:	21 st March 2023				
Agenda Item:	8				
Item Subject:	Budget update				
For:	Discussion		Decision	x	Information

Purpose of the Paper:

To update the board on the LEP's budget for 23/24 following confirmation of core funding.

Summary of Recommendations:

The Board is asked to review and approve the updated budget.

Main points:

LEPs finally had core funding for 23/24 confirmed in February. It was disappointing to see that core funding has been reduced again and the messages this send to directors, officers and stakeholders.

We have had confirmation that we will receive Growth Hub funding, but no details about how much so are currently showing costs associated with staff that work in part for the Growth Hub being fully met through core funding.

We have carried a ringfenced budget for redundancies for a number of years which we review bi-annually. To this ringfenced budget we have now added the costs of insolvency services and run off insurance. We have also added a budget to allow for the accountable body to oversee any legacy transactions such as arranging annual run off insurance, in the case of the LEP being wound up (a solvent insolvency) bringing this total to £171k.

The costs of operating the company in 23/24 are budgeted to be £864k, which will exceed projected income by £402k, leaving £462k to carry forward into 24/25.

We will continue to receive £100k in Shell Store Loan repayments which is shown separately under the Marches Investment Fund, but this funding can be used to meet core costs. We will have £1m left in the Marches Investment Fund (MIF) at the end of 23/24 so need to consider whether to ringfence some of this funding to meet operating costs in 24/25 or look at options for spending the funding during the next financial year which will have the most impact for the sub-region.

We are also waiting for confirmation from Telford s151 about how much Land Deal receipts we can expect in 23/24.

Summary of position:

	£	
LEP operating costs	-	981,620
Met by:		
Balance carried forward		858,820
Core Funding		250,000
HEZ		100,000
LA contributions		87,500
Interest on idle funds		25,000
Total		1,321,320

TBC
estimated

		p.a.
Income less costs	339,700	
Other Income		
Shell Store Loan repayments	100,000	
Uncommitted funding currently held		
Marches Investment Fund	1,038,970	
Telford Land deal	399,743	
Sub-total	1,538,713	
Expected balance at end of March 24	1,878,413	

As can be seen from the above we can comfortably meet this year's operating costs which have been produced on a worst-case scenario basis. We may well be able to meet some of these costs from other sources of income e.g. the Growth Hub.

Financial implications:
Finances are as detailed in the paper.

Legal implications:
The company remains a going concern and is fully able to meet its operating costs for the next 18 months.

Risks, opportunities and impacts:
The Board need to consider what to do with the MIF and Land Deal monies held. This will be subject to a wider conversation with board members.

Equality implications:
n/a

Additional information:

Report Author: Rachel Laver

Background papers/documents:
[Appendix 1 - LEP Budget 2023-24](#)

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Meeting date:	21 March 2023				
Agenda Item:	9				
Item Subject:	Transport Officers Group (TOG)				
For:	Discussion	X	Decision		Information X

<p>Purpose of the Paper: To review the progress of the consultants AECOM Ltd.</p>
<p>Summary of Recommendations: Members of the Board are asked to note the content of the report.</p>
<p>Main points: As agreed at the TOG meeting on 11th January 2023, a subgroup consisting of the 3 Marches local authorities and Ceredigion Council met with the LEP on the 27th January and 17th February to identify key transport projects that met the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience (Climate change, CO₂) • Regional/strategic impact (economy, skills, environment) • Multi-million pound • Start or completion within 5-10 years • As a minimum an outline assessment • Potential sources of regional or national funding <p>Using these criteria, the sub-group identified 4 broad projects and a sub-set of 4, more specific rail projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking of local authority cycling and walking plans to create a regional plan • Regional bus service improvement scheme (electric buses, alternative fuels etc.) • A49 strategic corridor (EV charging, micro grids, excess Welsh supply, super charging hubs on the east-west intersection along A49) • Freight network improvements (stopping facilities, decarbonisation, super charging hubs) • Rail projects (longer delivery timescales) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shrewsbury parkway ○ Ironbridge rail link ○ Midlands rail hub (Great Malvern duelling) ○ Shrewsbury Crewe rail link <p>These were discussed with AECOM Ltd on the 1st March and were presented by the company to the full TOG group on the 8th March. It was agreed that focus group meetings involving the whole TOG would take place before Easter to consider the four broad projects in more detail, identifying specific elements that could be evaluated using the Joint Appraisal Framework; the 4 rail projects would also be evaluated using the framework.</p>
<p>Financial implications: None</p>
<p>Legal implications: None</p>
<p>Risks, opportunities and impacts: None</p>
<p>Equality implications: None</p>
<p>Report Author: Mark Schneider, Head of Business Development and Delivery, Marches LEP</p>

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**Item 10 – Buoygues Energies & Services – smart micro energy grids -
presentation**

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Meeting date:	21 March 2023				
Agenda Item:	11				
Item Subject:	Update on Skills Advisory Panel and proposal for future strategic skills oversight				
For:	Discussion	X	Decision	X	Information

Purpose of the Paper:

To provide an update on the Marches Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) to outline proposals for future strategic skills oversight by the Marches LEP.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. To note the update provided.
2. To approve the proposal to develop a Strategic Skills and Employment Group as a sub-group of the LEP Board to replace the SAP.

Main points:

Background

In December 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the introduction of Skills Advisory Panels (SAP). These sought to bring together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge on skills and employment needs and collaborate in order to better understand and address local challenges.

The Marches SAP, building on the previous role carried out by the Marches Skills Board, was created in September 2019 and was originally chaired by James Staniforth, Principal and CEO of Shrewsbury Colleges Group. Graham Guest, Principal and CEO of Telford College, became SAP Chair in November 2021 when he joined the Marches LEP Board as FE Champion.

Actions and Achievements

Using DfE funding, the SAP commissioned research and several data and intelligence initiatives to inform strategy and support the skills and employment agenda across the Marches.

Examples include:

- Building data and intelligence capacity within the LEP and across partners to develop a strongly evidence-led approach to understanding local skills challenges and opportunities;
- Commissioning sector deep dives into the Marches' key sectors to understand skills needs and local provision;
- Leading the development and subsequent 2022 update of the [Marches Local Skills Report](#) and [Local Skills Report Annexes A and B](#) which set out an ambitious vision of how to meet the skills needs of employers and the aspirations of local residents;
- Monitoring the progress of implementation of the Local Skills Report Action Plan (subject to external funding opportunities);
- Providing economic data and evidence to underpin funding applications and to support collaborative delivery.

Within 2022/23, the SAP has also focussed on supporting Shropshire Chamber as our appointed Employer Representative Body (ERB) in the development of a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). In addition to providing updated economic data and core indicators as required by DfE, SAP funding has also been used to support the ERB in understanding local employment and skills trends (through the funding Lightcast subscriptions) and in identifying high growth employers in key sectors to support stakeholder engagement (through the funding of Beauhurst licences).

DfE has confirmed that there will no SAP funding with effect from 1 April 2023 and, therefore, no contractual requirement for LEPs to have a SAP.

Members are asked to note this update.

Marches Strategic Skills and Employment Group

It is proposed that a Strategic Skills and Employment Group is created as a sub-group of the Marches LEP Board. This will replace the SAP and enable the Marches LEP to maintain oversight of the skills and employment agenda. It will build on the analysis and findings of the Marches LSIP (when published) and complement the local authorities' oversight of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (people and skills) delivery. The group will focus on:

- Driving delivery of employment and skills initiatives in line with the objectives outlined in the Marches Strategic Economic Plan.
- Articulating and promoting local skills priorities to Government to tackle barriers to growth and maximise local investment, giving due consideration to the Marches Local Skills Investment Plan (LSIP) and the Employer Representative Body (ERB).
- Influencing investment decisions and delivery across the Marches by key funding bodies including the Education Skills Funding Agency and Department for Work & Pensions and their contractors to ensure public funds are responsive to market demand and align with the needs of employers and the economy.
- Fostering cooperation and collaboration between providers and Further Education institutions, Higher Education institutions and independent training providers and supporting them in developing provision that is responsive to employer and economic priorities across the Marches.
- Promoting skills investment in the Marches' workforce to employers to champion best practice approaches to recruitment, retention and skills development.
- Understanding wider dependencies in the local area and working with partners to remove barriers.
- Promoting the work of the Marches Careers Hub and supporting the development and delivery of its strategic plan in line with local priorities.

Terms of Reference for the Group will need to be developed and its core membership determined. It is proposed that members of the Group will be drawn from the following organisations in order to maintain a strategic overview and foster collaboration between different stakeholders:



Members are asked to approve the proposal to develop a Strategic Skills and Employment Group as a sub-group of the LEP Board to replace the SAP and to give delegated authority to Kathryn Jones (Head of Partnership & Strategy) to finalise the terms of reference and membership with oversight from Graham Guest (Marches LEP FE Champion).

Financial implications:

With the end of SAP funding, any skills and employment support provided by the Marches LEP (staffing, data and intelligence, project development activities) will need to be met from core funding.

This Group will provide a LEP-wide body to position the area for additional skills funding investment, including understanding opportunities associated with the proposed DfE Local Skills Investment Fund and with potential Adult Education Budget devolution/funding flexibilities.

Legal implications:

The Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 outlines Government policy on skills and employment and emphasises the following elements:

- Prioritising local needs and local people
- Supporting flexible study options
- Boosting the quality of education and training on offer
- Broadening careers advice for pupils
- Prioritising green skills

The scope of work undertaken by the SAP and associated funding is determined by a Memorandum of Understanding agreed with DfE which covers the period to 31 March 2023.

Risks, opportunities and impacts:

- The development of a Strategic Skills and Employment Group enables the Marches LEP to retain strategic oversight of the skills and employment agenda and its contribution to inclusive economic growth.
- Care will need to be taken not to duplicate work being undertaken by the local authorities and/or through other fora.

Equality implications:

Skills and employment interventions directly contribute to the inclusive economic growth agenda.

Additional information:

n/a

Report Author:

Kathryn Jones, Head of Partnerships & Strategy, kathryn.jones@marcheslep.org.uk

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Item 12 – LEP Network Update - discussion

End