

**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	DCarroll	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: 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</p>	

	<p>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>Board members noted the content of the LEP Chair and CEO report.</p>	
4.	<p>Report from the Performance Risk & Monitoring Committee meeting held on 15 December 2022</p> <p>SR referred members to the report.</p> <p>Board members noted the content of the report.</p>	
5.	<p>Marches LEP 2023/24 Budget</p> <p>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>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).</p>	RL
6.	<p>Board Member Fiduciary Responsibilities</p> <p>SR introduced Chris Harper (CH) from Bevan Brittan.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>	

	<p>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>	RL
7.	<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 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>	
11.	<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>Board members noted the content of the report.</p>	<p>RC</p> <p>MS</p>
12.	<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>		

Signed (electronically):

Sonia Roberts, Chair Marches LEP

Date: 21 March 2023