

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (LEP) SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Scrutiny Board held on Monday, 27 February 2023 at 10.00 am at County Offices, Kendal

PRESENT:

Mr J Lister	Miss HJ Fearon
Mr M Wilson (Vice-Chair)	Ms C McCarron-Holmes
Mrs HF Carrick	Mr CP Turner
Mr N Hughes	

Also in Attendance:-

Mrs L Davis	- Democratic Services Officer
Lord Inglewood	- Chair, Cumbria LEP Board
Ms J Lappin	- Chief Executive, Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership
Ms C Notman	- Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

PART 1 – ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

9 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Dew, Mr B Wearing and Mr B McEwan.

10 MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that Councillor Helen Fearon had replaced Councillor K Hitchen as a member of the Board.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED, that the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items on the agenda.

13 MINUTES

Amendment – add Councillor H Carrick and Councillor J Lister to the members who were present at the meeting.

Amendment – Minute No 8, Date and Time of Next meeting – delete sentence and add “The date and time of the next meeting is to be confirmed”.

Subject to the amendments above, it was:-

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2022 be confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

14 FINANCE UPDATE

The CLEP Chief Executive presented a finance update report. Members noted 2022/23 expenditure was in line with expectations and no budgets were causing concern. The budget for the 2022/23 financial year continued to show an operating surplus of £78,271 which meant that unrestricted income and expenditure reserves of £591,331 were forecasted to be carried forward into the 2023/24 financial year.

The CLEP Chief Executive informed members that at this point, it had not been possible to construct a provisional budget for 2023/24 as clarity had yet to emerge on the 2023/24 core funding, Growth Hub and DIT KAM funding. It was noted that a budget would be produced as soon as greater funding certainty was available.

To conclude, members noted that the LEP hosted the Cumbria Arts and Culture Network until the organisation established itself as a company. The LEP Board had asked that this process be concluded by the end of December 2022. A process was put in place to achieve this with a Deed of Termination signed between the parties with the hosting arrangements ceasing on 31 December 2022. The funds held on behalf of CACN were transferred to the new company alongside a record of expenditure.

In answer to a member’s question, the CLEP Chief Executive explained the budget line for Cumbria Arts and Culture Network. It was noted that the accounts, as presented, were dated 31 December 2022. Various acronyms in the report were explained.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

15 GOVERNANCE UPDATE

Members received an update report on the governance of the LEP. Since the last LEP Scrutiny Board, CLEP had appointed five new Board members to replace those members who had completed their terms of office or stepped down. The new members were listed in the report and had been inducted and were picking up new portfolio responsibilities. An existing member’s appointment had been extended for a further three-years term.

Members noted that the appointments had ensured that CLEP had met the gender equality target by the Government's January 2023 deadline with the Board now being 50% female and 50% male. The Board also continued to meet its requirement for two thirds of the Board to be from the private sector

Members were informed that Local Government Reorganisation would result in further changes to the Board with the public sector places being reduced from 6 to 4 to reflect the move to two new Local Authorities, with the shadow Leaders of both authorities invited to join the Board. A compensating reduction of 2 private sector members was planned for Summer 2023, when two members' term of office concluded.

It was reported that the County Council had acted as CLEP's single Accountable Body since its inception and had provided legal and financial assurance for CLEP funding and investment programmes. It was noted that this role would transfer to Westmorland and Furness Council, which would be responsible for the management and administration of CLEP funding to comply with Government assurance requirements, with the S151 Officer having the statutory assurance responsibility. It was further reported that the responsibility would not confer any preferential treatment in the decision making and allocation of CLEP funding, with investment decisions continuing to be made through the CLEP governance structure as set out in the Local Assurance Framework.

Members recognised that currently CLEP reported to the LEP Scrutiny Board as a single scrutiny body representing all Local Authorities. Going forward, the shadow authorities had confirmed that they would have separate scrutiny arrangements with the LEP required to report to both the Cumberland LEP Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Westmorland and Furness Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The arrangements were being integrated into the Local Assurance Framework.

The CLEP Chief Executive informed the Board that the anticipated update to the National Local Assurance Framework had yet to be completed by Government and work on updating the Local Assurance Framework to reflect changes to the Accountable Body and membership of the CLEP Board had now commenced. Work was underway to make the necessary changes and a final set of revisions to the Local Assurance Framework would be taken to the CLEP Board in March for approval in advance of vesting day. The changes would need to be agreed between CLEP and the two new authorities.

Government's Local Growth Assurance Team confirmed that Cumbria LEP's indicative outcome for the 22-23 Annual Performance Review process was: met. The "Met" rating was achieved across all three themes - Governance; Delivery and Strategic Impact – with "Met" being the highest rating that could currently be achieved.

In conclusion, the CLEP Chief Executive advised Board members that the LEP's Annual General Meeting, which was a key aspect of the LEP's wider assurance process to stakeholders and the public, had been arranged for Friday 29 September 2023 at 2.00pm.

Members, in discussion requested CLEP training sessions for new authority members. The CLEP representatives confirmed that offers of this had been made. The LGR arrangements for the scrutiny of the LEP was discussed. In answer to a member's question, the CLEP representatives confirmed that as the LEP was a strategic economic body for the whole of Cumbria, the policy and decision making would remain the same, taking into account the county's different demographics. The CLEP Chief Executive advised that the LEP's AGM was open to everyone, promoted widely and provided an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils' engagement. It was suggested that benchmarking takes place with other authorities who had gone through the LGR process.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

16 STRATEGY UPDATE

A report was received by members that provided an update on the LEP's current strategic priorities. It was noted that work continued on implementing the strategy documents that the LEP Scrutiny Panel had previously considered including the Clean Energy Strategy, Business Decarbonisation 10 Point Plan, Sector Plans and Restart, Reboot, Rethink. The Scrutiny Board had previously expressed particular interest in the work that the LEP was doing to address Cumbria's acute labour and skills challenges and as such the report majored on that and provided a copy of the draft Apprenticeship Strategy for comment.

The Chief Executive outlined actions taken to progress strategies and informed members of a very productive first meeting of the Refugee Employability Working Group. It was noted that CLEP had appointed MetroDynamics to support it in developing the Future of Food workstream and Lord Inglewood had hosted two roundtable sessions with major landowners to explore how Cumbria's exceptional natural capital could be better commercialised for the benefit of the economy, businesses and citizens.

A lengthy discussion took place on encouraging people to come live and work in Cumbria, on the draft Apprenticeship strategy, Cumbria's declining age population impacting on the county's economic values and unemployment in the 18-24 year old bracket. It was reported that work was taking place in conjunction with the DWP on why over 50s were exiting the workplace.

In discussion of the Labour Supply Action plan a member expressed concerns on the loss of traditional building skills. Another member advised of big employers monopolising skilled workers and what could be done to address this. The CLEP Chief Executive outlined actions taken for apprentices such as "Our Future/Your Future Campaign" and on a draft strategy currently in production outlining key issues in relation to 'right product, right place, right price'. It was agreed that the CLEP's draft response to the National Planning Policy be circulated to members. Frustration was expressed on the lack of take up of Skills Bootcamp courses designed to upskill workers. Members were informed on activity on Clean Energy generation, which increasingly considered hydrogen opportunities.

Transport barriers, especially in rural areas, preventing people from working were discussed. Necessary rail improvements and sustainable travel were mentioned. The CLEP representatives confirmed they continued to push rail companies for rail improvements. To conclude, agriculture unbalance and concerns around arable digestion were highlighted.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

17 DELIVERY UPDATE

Members received a report focussing on the delivery theme and that provided an update on the delivery of the LEP's capital and revenue programmes. It was noted that CLEP's major capital programmes, Getting Building Fund and Local Growth Fund were financially completed in line with Government's respective deadlines. However, a number of projects still required practical completion and evidence to confirm defrayal of expenditure, in line with the Grant Funding Agreement.

Members were updated on the capital and revenue programmes covering the Getting Building Fund, Local Growth Fund, Northern Cultural Regeneration Fund, Community Infrastructure Fund, Skills Bootcamps, Growth Hub Business Support Programme, Barrow Town Deal, Careers Hub and International Trade.

The related risks associated with the Marina Village and Low Carbon Barrow were discussed.

It was agreed that an explanation of GBM5 from page 56 of the report be circulated to members following the meeting.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that this was the last meeting of the Board in the life of Cumbria County Council.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm