

# GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership

Board Paper – 20 April 2021

1. **Agenda Item 6**
2. **What is this item for: Strategic Update**
  - a. To update the board on strategic activity:
    - National LEP Review
    - Board Seminar Series Update
    - Board Member Recruitment
  - b. To provide background information for the board on each of the above and answer any questions that may arise

3. **Background:**

- 3.1 **National LEP Review**

In the budget last month, the Chancellor formally announced the launch of several programmes to support economic recovery and growth including the Levelling up and Community Renewal Funds. Funds are to be distributed through Local Authorities and this section focuses on the reference to LEPs and the implication of those announcements on the role of LEPs going forward and how that is being developed at a national level.

For the past five years LEPs have been responsible for leading bids and co-ordinating delivery of economic growth funding within their respective areas such as the Local Growth Fund, Getting Building Fund and the European Structural Funds. The new funds will instead be competitively managed at national level, with local authorities bidding into the new funds on behalf of local areas.

Government is also moving away from the national industrial strategy and has launched the Build Back Better strategy alongside the budget. There are still references to the relevance of the Local Industrial Strategies in both of the funding streams.

Given the impact of these policy announcements and previous statements made by the Secretary of State, the Budget set out a commitment to review the future role of LEPs which will also include LEP geographies. Robert Jenrick at a recent roundtable event on the launch of the fund confirmed the role of LEPs was under review and likely to evolve.

At a recent meeting of LEP Network Chairs and senior civil servants (that the GFirst Chair and Chief Executive were present at) it was confirmed that a detailed review is underway to look at the future function and form of the LEPs. This review will be published by the summer, beginning with jointly agreeing the Terms of Reference and the appointment of a lead Minister to oversee the review. It was made very clear by the senior civil servants at the meeting that the review will aim to strengthen, through LEPs, the voice of business in local economic development and is very much a process of **evolution** and **not extinction**.

As the representative Chief Executive for the Western Gateway LEPs, I am part of the national LEP Network group taking this work forward and will provide further details at the board meeting.

By way of context below is the extract from the Budget announcements:

*“As we look towards the UK Shared Prosperity Fund next year, we are conscious of the need for an evolution of the way we support local economic growth so it can best support levelling up for the long term.*

*The UK government will work with local partners throughout 2021 to develop an approach that delivers the infrastructure and regeneration priorities local leaders want to see in their area. We will also be working with local businesses on the future role of Local Enterprise Partnerships. We want to ensure local businesses have clear representation and support in their area, in order to drive the recovery. We will work with Local Enterprise Partnerships over the coming months, with a view to announcing more detailed plans ahead of summer recess. This will also include consideration of Local Enterprise Partnership geographies.”*

### **3.2 GFirst Board Seminars**

Board members will recall we held a series of five seminars over the winter period covering the following subjects: Cyber Eco-System; Growth Hubs; Skills and Employment; Equality, Inclusion, and Diversity; Environmental Impact. A brief update on progress following each of the sessions is below:

**Cyber Eco-System:** The LEP team continue to work with colleagues from across the county and Government officials to deliver the full potential for the sector. The Cyber Leadership group (of which the LEP is a member) continues to co-ordinate the offer for cyber across the county and wider region – including through highlighting the potential for the Western Gateway.

**Growth Hubs:** There is a separate paper for consideration at this meeting to incorporate strategic direction for Growth Hubs in the role of the GFirst LEP board and to disband the Growth Hub board and replace it with a new operational board for Growth Hubs led by the GFirst LEP Director of Strategic Growth. In addition, the paper outlines the proposal to create an LEP board ‘Champion’ for Growth Hubs and for Jenny Raymond to take on this role.

**Skills and Employment:** The following documents have now been completed and published on the revised and updated LEP skills page (<https://www.gfirstlep.com/about-us/skills-for-business/>): Employment and skills evidence base; Skills priorities for economic recovery; Employment and skills action plan; Local Skills Report; Local skills report core data. There is a separate paper for consideration at this meeting on the work of the Employment and Skills Team. In addition, the paper outlines the proposal to create an LEP board ‘Champion’ for Employment and Skills and for Jim Grant to take on this role.

**Equality, Inclusion, and Diversity:** You will have received, and hopefully completed, the LEP Network diversity survey. In addition, the LEP team are continuing to develop an E, I & D action plan for the LEP under the leadership of Lorrin White as LEP Board Champion for E, I & D. Further update will follow at the next board meeting.

**Environmental Impact:** Good relations continue with the Local Nature Partnership and a joint proposal to set up a natural capital investment vehicle is being explored. The County Climate Change Co-ordinator recruitment process has now taken place (which the LEP were involved in) and we await final confirmation of the successful candidate. Growth Hubs continue to promote the shift to Net Zero through specialist advice and we have had initial discussions with Andrew Griffith MP (Government business Net Zero champion) on becoming an early adopter for the Net Zero campaign for business.

### **3.3 Board Member Recruitment**

Board members will be aware that all terms of office were extended until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 in response to the Covid crisis. Board members will also be aware that the renewed Assurance Framework allows for private and VCS board members to complete two terms of office of three years. By exception (taken to mean if successfully recruited to be Chair of the LEP) a board member can complete a third term of three years.

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The recruitment campaign for the New Chair and other private sector vacancies began on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and it is intended to complete the process, in line with prior policy, by the end of June 2021.

### 4. **Risks / Issues:**

**National LEP Review** – The Chief Executive will closely monitor progress of the review and actively engage in the process through the LEP Network. Updates will be provided to board members as and when appropriate.

**Board Seminar Series Update** – The LEP Executive team will oversee progress and actions on the five discussion areas and update board members as and when appropriate.

**Board Member Recruitment** – The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive will closely monitor the level of applications received, amend the campaign if required, and update the board as and when appropriate.

### 5. **Recommendations:**

The board are asked to promote the recruitment campaign and the Chief Executive will update the board on progress as and when appropriate.

### 6. **Further information:**

Further information will be presented at the meeting or is available from David Owen ([david.owen@gfirstlep.com](mailto:david.owen@gfirstlep.com))