

DRAFT MINUTES

DORSET LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

28 MARCH 2024 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.30 PM

AT DIGITAL SKILLS HUB, 30-32, ROYAL ARCADE, CHRISTCHURCH RD, BOSCOMBE, BH1 4BT

MINUTES

Board Attendees:

Cecilia Buffon (CB) (Chair)
Cllr Millie Earl (ME)
Nick Gaines (NG)
Nicola Newman (NN)
Paul Read (PR)
Phil Sayles (PS)
Cllr Vikki Slade (VS)

Also Present:

Clare Fleming (CF) (Dorset LEP)
Joe Saffer (DLUHC)
Jon Bird (JB) (Dorset Council)
Rebecca Davies (RD) (Dorset LEP)
Shelley Collins-Trevett (SCT) (Dorset LEP)
Vinita Nawathe (VN) (Dorset LEP)

Apologies:

Aaron Lawes (AL)
Aidan Dunn (AD) (Dorset Council)
Anwen Jones (AJ) (Cities and Local Growth Unit)
Ian Girling (IG)
Jim Andrews (JA)
Luke Rake (LR)
Neil Skelland (NS)
Paul Gough (PG)
Cllr Simon Gibson (SG)
Cllr Spencer Flower (SF)

Item	Notes and Decisions	Action
1.	<p>Apologies were received for: Jim Andrews, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Simon Gibson, Neil Skelland, Ian Girling, Aidan Dunn, Luke Rake and Anwen Jones.</p> <p>Declarations of Interest: No declarations of interest were declared.</p>	
2.	<p>Chair's Update</p> <p>CB noted good feedback and discussions coming out of the Homes & Economy Conference; a successful Dorset Skills day; and Jet2 arriving at Bournemouth airport.</p> <p>CB outlined the One Health cluster bid which has been submitted as a result of the LEP convening a One Health Enterprise Network steering group and LEP officer commitment. The bid is led by BU with Bristol University (in light of their vet school), and Southampton University (providing time in kind). An EPSRC bid for just under £2.5m over 4 years.</p>	
	<p>Board Members' Update</p> <p>NS provided an update via CB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUKAS has chosen BAE Systems to build its submarines. We should be building BAE Systems and Atlas Electronik into our strategic thinking. • Also considering what a deal with CTPPP might mean to businesses in Dorset. • He will be going to IndoPac 24 and is working to build the defence and security cluster. • Noted that base load electricity supply is a real and growing issue for businesses on the west side of the county. • Acknowledged that GSW has a good focus on defence, energy and food security. • NS is hosting a session at Ocean Tech in Plymouth in June <p>PR updated the board on the MMC and Digital Skills Weymouth which is training and educating around 40 people from 20 companies around off site manufactured housing and with a focus on zero carbon.</p> <p>NN reported on the Dorset Skills Day. A good experience that they would like to repeat. A learning outcome was that employers like to hear from other employers. There was great support from providers. Meeting with DFE, who are positive, about next steps. They are today issuing new priorities for the sector and are collectively working on a report to the Skills board for the beginning of June.</p> <p>VS gave evidence in parliament on Tuesday as a vice chair to the Local Government Association about the future of high streets, towns and small cities, promoting the work in Poole as one of her case studies. VS also referenced the Accommodation BID. Encouraging signs that hoteliers will vote for the BID which provides a £2 levy on qualifying hotels. Money is held by the BID (with a range of stakeholders on the board) for destination marketing, events and work to uplift the area. First in the UK for leisure and tourism (Liverpool and Manchester are around business). There should be a knock on for the rest of Dorset. CB noted this is good to hear.</p>	

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3	Policy	
3.1	<p>Economic Strategy and Evidence Base</p> <p>EB outlined that the purpose of the document is to have a clear position over what we want to achieve and alignment over priorities. There is a balance of being too focussed and keeping it broad enough to provide a useful basis for bids.</p> <p>VN noted this will be an institutional-facing strategy document. The evidence base refresh and request for a strategy comes towards the end of the Comprehensive Spending Review and in an election year. We want to ensure alignment with Council strategies and ownership by the councils on whose behalf we are pulling this together. DBT's grant for LEP functions requires a refreshed area strategy looking forward ten years to be published by the councils in October. The aim is to get a straw man consultation draft out for wider consultation with stakeholder groups in order to give a consulted upon draft to the Councils in summer to take through their processes. It takes into account the local council plans and will provide priorities for intervention and opportunity. This session is an opportunity to consider and steer the direction of the first draft.</p> <p>EB has circulated the evidence base, which aims to cover the broad issues and looks at long term trends, and an outline start of a strategy document with a draft vision of where we want to be in 10 – 20 years' time, which acknowledges current and previous strategies and conversations with the Board. EB noted later in the discussion that the evidence base draws data from ONS and other sources. EB encouraged questions and feedback.</p> <p>PR spoke of the recent Competition and Markets Authority Report on housebuilding noting that it shines a light on the fact that the current housebuilding model is not focussed on the needs of an area but has evolved over time around house types and uses of land. There is also an assumption that existing housing stock will keep going, not acknowledging the existing decline. The Net Zero agenda might help to provide some of the solution. This needs to be reflected in the evidence base.</p> <p>NG queried who uses the evidence base and how we can make it more useful to them. He has a concern that we create something and assign an unvalidated value to it. In business such a document would need to be concise.</p> <p>RD noted she uses it for bid applications.</p> <p>CB noted that if an opportunity comes up, we have this evidence base to use. A shorter, briefer document is what will finally be presented – but this is a comprehensive background. We'd be expected to have this kind of knowledge and understanding of pan-Dorset.</p> <p>EB reassured the board, in response to a note from JB, that there is a trace of sources and references and CB noted these would be stored separately to the document.</p>	

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3.1	<p>Economic Strategy and Evidence Base Cont'd</p> <p>NN agreed that there needs to be a really solid evidence base. Her experience of using evidence is that it is a revelation – especially to employers. She also acknowledged that it had to be relevant to be of value.</p> <p>CB noted that when the labour market data was given to the ICP it provided a very good insight into wider factors affecting employment and impacting health and care vacancies.</p> <p>NN noted that the evidence provided at the Homes & Economy Conference was a revelation about the low productivity of the county.</p> <p>VN gave her experience of how such an evidence based approach swings in and out of favour across time / governments. She envisages a swing towards a strong evidence based approach. EB outlined a recent experience on another project in the South West, when Treasury asked for a document they had submitted to be resubmitted with all the references to evidence added. Then once they had been checked, they asked for the published version to remove the references -the point being they wanted to know there was evidence behind assertions.</p> <p>CB noted that we do need to keep in mind the costs and resources we've attributed to this workstream.</p> <p>VS noted that there is a new draft Local Plan for BCP and emphasised the fact that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are viewed as distinct towns – not a single city. CB reassured VS that this was noted and would be taken on board.</p> <p>PS recognised the document as a very good body of work that will prove valuable in developing the strategy. However, he wants to understand who the authority will be behind it, who will adopt it and whether it will engage with purposeful activity. Also wants to know how it fits into the integration agenda.</p> <p>VN explained that an update of the evidence base would have been an exercise done by the LEP anyway, but that we are now required to do it, to support the councils in delivering their strategy piece by October. There will be a consultation period with a wide range of stakeholders, but who will drive it forward and secure funds to deliver the long term strategy and delivery plan is to be decided by the people around the table.</p> <p>There followed a robust discussion about the detail of the draft evidence base.</p> <p>Key points:</p> <p>VS emphasised the need to ensure positive language and focus on sectors with opportunities for growth.</p> <p>EB acknowledged the feedback and stressed the differences between the evidence base document and the resulting strategy document.</p> <p>JS noted that it is helpful to consider what the 30 second elevator pitch is as a way of being concise.</p>	

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3.1	<p>Economic Strategy and Evidence Base Cont'd</p> <p>NN was curious that some of the sector data didn't reflect the sectors that the LSIP focus on – which are more that those that are considered to be innovative and emerging.</p> <p>PS noted that sometimes high GVA sectors are different from focus sectors. He also raised that there is a piece around there being enough people here – how do we enable human resources that we have to be productive, happy and prosperous. If we can fuel the businesses with high GVA that will have an impact.</p> <p>VN added that we cannot ignore where things are not so positive – where there is a need for intervention. The demographic piece is a complex one that is also national and global.</p> <p>ME picked up on the positive language piece – current low growth is an opportunity for high growth. The data about people moving away needs to be balanced by action to keep them here. How can we look at how tech is evolving, and which business sectors are seeing growth? It's about looking at the non-traditional piece. Perhaps the last 20 years of economic growth hasn't suited Dorset as much as the next 20 years will. ME's portfolio is about belonging and communities. Less focussed on the economic drivers and focussing on the social drivers.</p> <p>NG is interested in the mechanism that creates change. Previous strategies have not stemmed the exodus of young people. Something very different is required. It is also about community and possibility, a sense of activity and place. People move towards areas of high economic activity.</p> <p>CB noted that all the reflections are useful. She reassured the board that this is a working document that will be finessed and that we need to agree on how we use the evidence and how we build the strategy piece. There is a balance between acknowledging what the base line is that makes the area tick and where the opportunities are. CB noted that this piece of work could be a package – of documents, video, talking heads etc. She is interested in whether this document reflects a place we can all recognise.</p> <p>On the draft strategy document:</p> <p>PS noted that we need a document that inspires and motivates. It needs to not just be about long term vision but about what we can achieve in the next 2 – 3 years. It's about also about getting the right language to conceptualise what we have here. He reiterated that we need to focus on the people who are here e.g. reducing benefit bills, attracting funding for doable and innovative activity.</p> <p>VS commented on how, when she has been to parliament, few people can place Dorset. We are well connected – and we need to reflect that – connectivity to London, to Europe, to the rest of the country and digitally. It needs a sense of place, anchored in the centre of the south coast where we look in all directions. It needs positive language to emphasise a wonderful place where we are rethinking the future and accelerating sustainable growth.</p>	

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3.1	<p>Economic Strategy and Evidence Base Cont'd</p> <p>NG observed that 10 years is not a long time to change the dial. We can hope to attract businesses if we create an environment that leads to a net influx of businesses, that would be a success. We should point to the uniqueness of what we do have – environment and businesses. We need to be really passionate about just a few outcomes. It needs to speak to actions that are achievable.</p> <p>ME picked up on the uniqueness of what we have in Dorset – the combination of nature / leisure and urban environments. We should also recognise that we have skilled people with young families and people in midlife who are not necessarily looking for the urban environment.</p> <p>VN flagged that there is an issue right through from 18 to 65 – the data presented at the Homes & Economy Conference pointed to those with families who cannot afford to live here. If we can make Dorset a place where families want to live, then we would succeed.</p> <p>JS was supportive of looking at it through the lens of opportunity and growth.</p> <p>NN picked up on the point of working with the human resources we have – we do have some amazing talent – and it can be in the older demographic too. We also need to rise above the south west and the locality of our country – we need to be talking global – people work globally, travel globally – we need to look at international.</p> <p>PR likes the central hub idea – Dorset as a magnetic force, connected and outward looking. Connectivity is positive. We have natural assets all around us. We can build on being a magnetic hub for business.</p> <p>CB: Recognised that affordability is an issue for families – we need to find an innovative way to support people to live here – for example housing connected to jobs. It's also about setting out what we can realistically do for businesses. We must make sure we have the right language around innovation, the sustainable, and natural. Reflecting on the creative piece of work done at the Dorset Ambassador breakfast which spoke to heritage, business, natural, health and wellness. Someone coined the term "Area of Outstanding Natural Business". We need to speak to what people really think of the place and the passion they have for the place. We need to have something that reflects action, passion and enthusiasm. We also need to be able to flex a lot of this depending on who the audience is.</p> <p>Action: EB to update evidence base and strategy outline in line with discussion and new BCP draft Local Plan</p>	EB
4.	CIC Business	
4.1	<p>FACR Update and GPF Proposal</p> <p>NG reviewed the progress against 2023/24 budget which is presented in the financial statement. The FACR Committee reviewed a draft budget for the next 2 years, delivering the services as currently delivered. NG noted that the Task and Finish group will be proposing how the core services will be delivered in the coming years and CB noted that we have to make a decision on that to get it in place by March 2025. NG urged that, whilst there is no immediate need,</p>	

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4.1	<p>FACR Update and GPF Proposal Cont'd</p> <p>making decisions earlier rather than later would be advisable. NG noted that the LEP team manage their budget tightly.</p> <p>VS acknowledged that the timeline of any discussions around devolution will not dovetail with the timeline about the future delivery of services and there is an appetite to bring forward that decision.</p> <p>NG noted that any decision about the future delivery of services needs to be a Board decision. The Task & Finish group needs to give the Board the information so that they can make that decision.</p> <p>VN noted that we are not looking for this board to approve the outturn for 2023/24 and the budget was indicative based on assumed funds – it is an illustration of the direction of travel and when we have the final figures it will come to the board for discussion/approval.</p> <p>NG outlined the debate on the Growing Places Fund proposal made to the FACR Committee. With the lack of responses to the last round of GPF, the paper proposed taking action to develop and trial a new approach to providing affordable accommodation to young people working in the county.</p> <p>VN has spoken to the Section 151 Officer to see if this would be part of the scope of the Fund. The original concept for the GPF was about housing and communities. The Section 151 Officer's view is that working up such a proposal would be in scope.</p> <p>VS acknowledged the good intention of the idea but expressed reservation about starting a new project at this point and would like to see the money utilised for something that can be delivered in a shorter timescale.</p> <p>NG noted that the LEP needs to continue to make decisions that benefit the people of Dorset.</p> <p>VN noted that the loan fund sits within a ringfenced account at Dorset Council who loan the money on behalf of the LEP, and ongoing loan liabilities would normally remain with Dorset Council.</p> <p>PS wanted to understand what the parameters of the fund are currently and whether there is scope for changing them to, for example, provide grants to be spent within the year. VN outlined that the GPF was intended as a recoverable fund which set out to unlock infrastructure, housing and jobs. Dorset LEP chose to set it up as a revolving loan for this purpose. If parameters were to change the Section 151 officer would have to approve any repurposing.</p> <p>A lively and challenging discussion followed about the future options for the delivery of services that the LEP provides, the position of the councils, the operational considerations (in particular around the other contracts won by the LEP CIC (Digital Skills Hub and CEC Careers Hub) which continue beyond March 2025).</p>	

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4.1	<p>FACR Update and GPF Proposal Cont'd</p> <p>VS flagged that an officer from each council had been asked to look at the assets and liabilities of the LEP and this information will be made available to the Task & Finish Group.</p> <p>NG noted we are awaiting the outcome of the work of the Task & Finish group, legal picture and scenario planning so a decision can be made by the board.</p> <p>ME noted that the scope of the Task & Finish group does not include the future of the LEP, but the delivery of core services.</p> <p>VS requested that both councils bring their position to the next Board meeting.</p> <p>ME requested that the Task & Finish Group be able to progress its work, even if members of the group could not attend meetings. CB suggested any all members of the group should read the papers and respond in writing if they are unable to attend.</p> <p>VN reiterated that in the meantime, the LEP team will continue to deliver their contracted functions as usual. The timeline the board had agreed was for a decision on the future delivery of services by October so arrangements could be put in place for the end of the financial year.</p> <p>PS acknowledged that it is difficult and challenging for those delivering the services to have uncertainty.</p> <p>Returning to the Growing Places Fund, NG noted that any change to the structure of the fund would need to be taken to the Section 151 Officer and agreed by the Board. It was agreed that a paper on the legal position and a range of options for discussion would be brought to the next Board meeting.</p> <p>A discussion was had about the date of the next board meeting to enable most members to attend. It was agreed that meetings should avoid school holidays, but that the next meeting should be moved a week later rather than a week earlier - to early June- to allow time for Dorset's cabinet to have formed.</p>	
5.	For Noting	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CB recognised she has not delivered the shared agenda but this has been a useful discussion. • VS requested that the great work being done by the LEP team and the award won by the Digital Skills Hub should be minuted. • PS wanted it recognised that the board do read the papers and also recognised the work being done. • SCT noted that businesses are asking for support and training and are reassured by it being business as usual for the next 12 months. Businesses appreciate the pan Dorset offering. • CB thanked the board for the meeting. 	

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	Other Action Points	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VS to ensure that EB has the BCP draft Local Plan. • VN will share next iteration of the evidence base and strategy document by email as we need to reach out for consultation before getting the document to the councils so it can go through their processes before publication by October. • Local Authority partners to outline their position on the future of the delivery of core services at the next board meeting. • Task & Finish group to work up options for the future ways of working for the next board meeting. This will also look at the future of the GPF. • Task & Finish group members to read papers and submit written responses if they are unable to attend the meetings. • VN and CB to discuss the parameters of the GPF with Section 151 Officer. • VN and CB to seek legal advice on changing the parameters of the GPF and provide a paper on the options for the next Board Meeting. • VN to select a new date for the next Board Meeting – proposed the first week of June. 	<p>VS</p> <p>VN</p> <p>VS/SF</p> <p>CB/VN</p> <p>CB/VN</p> <p>VN/CB</p> <p>VN/CB</p> <p>VN</p>
6.	Minutes from the Last Meeting	
	The Minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the last meeting. There were no matters arising.	
7.	Any Other Business	
	There was no other business raised.	

Note: Date of Next Meeting: 6 June 2024 – virtual meeting