

Business Leadership Group**MS Teams meeting- Thursday, 06 April 2023, 14- 16:00****Present:**

Stuart Elford (SE) – Devon & Plymouth Chamber of Commerce/ Chair
Eifion Jones (EJ) – LEP Chief Operating Officer
Amanda Ratsey (AR) – Business Theme Lead / Local Authority (Plymouth City Council)
Dolores Riordan (DRi) – Local Authority (Devon County Council)
Noel Stevens (NS) – ESIF Committee Representative / Business Representative (Alder King)
Paul Bird (PB) – Digital Lead (Elixel)
Carmen Hanif (CH) – Business Body Representative/ (FSB- Devon)
Dirk Rohwedder (DR) – Business Representative (Dartington and Bristol School for Social Entrepreneurs)
Alistair Handyside (AH) - Tourism Alliance
Katriona Lovelock (KL) - Local Authority (Somerset County Council)
Adam Chambers (AC) – Business Representative (Smart Outcomes Limited)
Ruth Lambert (RL) – Business Body Representative/ (FSB- Somerset and Wiltshire)

Supporting Officers:

Carla Modley (CM) – HotSW LEP Inward Investment Manager
Colin Bettison (CB) – Local Authority (Plymouth City Council)
David Hynd (DH) – Growth Hub's Programme & Partnership Manager
Katherine Malavelle (KM) –Growth Hub (Thrive)
Hadelzein Elobeid (HE) – Local Authority (Plymouth City Council)

Apologies:

Richard Stevens (RS) – Chairman/ LEP Board member / Business Representative (Citybus Ltd.)
Chris Wardman (CW) – General Dynamics UK Ltd
Shaun Hoppins (SH) – Business Representative (S D Solution)
Philip Mitchell (PM) – Photonics Lead (Lumentum)
Dee Gill (DG) – Business Support Representative (Business Information Point)
Julia Blaschke (JuB) – Local Authority (Plymouth City Council)

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1	Introductions, Apologies and Conflicts of Interest- Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introductions and apologies were made (please see above), - Chair welcomed new BLG member- Carmen Hanif - Conflict of interest was declared by: SE, KL and DR (mainly on peer networks)
2	Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising- Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Last meeting minutes were approved- noting the action: to include a slot about local skills partnerships in the next meeting(s). - To circulate the findings from local skills partnerships' plan to BLG.
3	Feedback and budget reflections- including announcement re. LEPs and UKSPF update Growth Hub Update
	<p>Announcements re. LEPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SE started the conversation, saying that from the British Chambers of Commerce point of view; it was a sentiment budget designed to pacify and stabilise- that there wasn't any actual announcement and no mention of South West, there was no mention of the promised business rates reform neither was any announcement about additional energy support. • EJ continued the discussion, also mentioning that there was nothing in the announcement about the South West. He then talked about the part which discussed the future of LEPs' funding- saying that although there was still no decision at that point, yet he can go through the scenario of possible implications. • He went on informing the group about the government's decision of not supporting LEPs from 2024- meaning that there is no precise decision yet on the future of LEPs. EJ mentioned that a data gathering exercise has been initiated by the government and that a decision is expected in summer.

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- EJ said that there are some sensible questions around funding as well as the structural nature of LEP's functions and its future and that the real challenge being for this area is that opportunities haven't yet changed (same as 20 years ago: low productivity, the right skills for jobs.. etc.).
- He said that what's important to think as a group about what does a good business support proposition look like and what the business needs are. He went on mentioning three aspects: a universal service, clear access to finance and specific business support that the area needs in particular (peer networks...). EJ encouraged the group to broadly discuss a good business support proposition; upon which a brief will be formed discussing future structure.

Comments and Questions:

- SE commented that a main comment he heard over the years is that business support is fragmented- there is no simple navigation through it and that it is very sporadic. He said that what's needed is a business strategy for the next 10 years rather than scattered pots of money and sporadic help.
- EJ seconded SE's argument, adding that this is a floor for talking about what good starts look like, what we think good business support is and where the structure needs to deliver to.
- RL talked about the marketing of the support- saying that not that more support or different support is needed but rather to get the message out there in a more coherent and effective way. She commended the Growth Hub's work but mentioned that its work is still unknown to many businesses and that hence what effectively needs to be done is to think about different ways of getting the message rather than the traditional ones.

UKSPF update:

- KM gave an Devon County Council update on UKSPF- mentioning 3 strands of activities, first of which is one she is leading on which is a

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	<p>shared prosperity fund business support project, a follow on partly from Thrive, but also various other strands of activity that they have been undertaking recently, particularly through recovery funds. She added that this project will be a provision of both generalist business support which will sit, although not contractually alongside the Growth Hub as well as incorporating elements of start- up support, greener net zero business support and job creation, job safeguarding support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KM added that they are finalising legal agreements with the three areas that took them up on those support (Exeter, East Devon and mid Devon). Once agreements are signed off, they will be in a position to launch an invitation to tender. She then talked about the certain value that will be through supplying the South West, other strands of activity are both agri- focused- mentioning a series of agri events which will be in mid Devon, East Devon South Hams and West Devon. She encouraged all interested to contact her so she adds them to the communications' list. • KM concluded that they are working on getting these projects deployed as quickly as possible, adding that they are keen to make sure that there isn't a gap in provision, making sure businesses should always be contacting the Growth Hub to find out about opportunities. • AR presented a Plymouth UKSPF update; saying that they are in regular talks with colleagues in Devon and Torbay to make sure that they get a joined up process. She added that there are a series of business support procurements coming out which align to what sort of happening in in Devon, and that they continue to keep people abreast about what's happening. • AR added that the main problem with UKSPF is there is just not enough money in the pot and it is as hard to say no to somebody as it is to say yes to something probably harder. So actually managing expectations around how limited the pot is, particularly when a lot of the current European projects are now coming to an end (end of June).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AR said that in terms of strategy; it is key to bear in mind a fairer allocation as well as the need to look at that in the next 6 to 9 months to make sure that it is fairly in all the various lobbying opportunities available at different times. She concluded with the plea to make sure to speak with one voice around the unfair allocation. <p>Comments and Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SE asked about how to lobby and campaign and AR asked to come back later with suggestions. AR suggested preparing a HotSW briefing with all info and figures telling why it was an unfair allocation and suggesting how to go forward. SE seconded AR's suggestion and proposed writing a shared letter where they could all be co- signatories. RL said that she would like to learn about whereabouts of UKSPF in Somerset and asked whether future UKSPF updates would include a Somerset overview. She added that she wants to learn about how parts of the South West are handling the rural prosperity fund. <p>Growth Hub Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DH gave an overview saying that connecting businesses and business need with support is now getting a bit harder with a lot of the ERDF programme ended or coming to an end such as Thrive. He added that the Department for Business have announced funding for growth hubs nationally, 12 million pounds, £1 million up from last year. He highlighted the importance of providing some sort of continuity to try and solve the "cliff edge" situation - through joining up support. Hence, knowing that shared prosperity projects going live or anything else actually that Growth Hub could connect up with brings excitement.
4	Inward investment options
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CM shared a document with the audience depicting options for HotSW inward investment service. She talked about the key functions in liaison with government and investment- mainly through the Department for

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	<p>Business and Trade, adding that over the last three years the core delivery has been on the ERDF inward investment project which is coming to an end in the summer. CM said that 4 grants have gone out on that, and a number of new jobs created.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CM then talked about working on inward investment activities to varying degrees; adding that she is currently working on behalf of the Somerset authorities to deliver inward investment- with a brand new website and brand set up on that (https://investsomerset.co.uk/) - taking into account the Great South West work. She mentioned one of their priorities which is growing the global footprint of the Great South West for which CM said they are commissioning some consultants to develop an internationalisation strategy which will cover the whole of the Great South West looking at both inward investment and trade. • Regarding the 2023/24 delivery for inward investment, CM put together some recommended areas that they would like to continue and asked the group to point out any miss- outs or add any suggestions. She mentioned that the first priority is continued support for the area and reminded the group about the five potential opportunity propositions developed around photonics, marine autonomy and smart aviation. CM added that they would like to develop more of those, working with local partners around what other key sub sectors they may have around digital or health potentially. • CM concluded with the need to think about transition, moving forward and the need to support those arrangements. <p>(Please see the attached document for further details)</p> <p>Comments and Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AR asked about how this is all funded. CM said that it is mostly by the department business and trade, that the Somerset work is funded by Somerset Council, and that she has a small core inward investment budget to be used for certain aspects of this.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AR asked CM about the work of Freeport which she answered that they have their own funds and that them as inward investment don't have a specific pot of money for the free pot. SE asked where this goes with devolution and time scales with devolution and whether they are carrying on regardless; CM answered that what she presented was for this financial year and the a business plan for this financial year until the end of March 2024, adding that since no one is sure what will be happening going forward, they will be flexible and change what needs to as more is known. <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the evaluation of the project in the next meeting.
5	Peer Networks spec for feedback
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CB started his presentation by mentioning that after a proposal sent to the Operations and Investment Committee (OIC); funding has been agreed. He then talked about the Peer Networks; a government commission programme, A mobilised at very short notice in 2020-2021 (pre- covid) which delayed in delivery then kicked off. CB continued to describe how the programme went on by selecting delivery partners, that the feedback from year one and then into year two which was a good and worthwhile programme. CB continued to describe more particulars and context about the programme and the proposal (please see the attached document for further details). EJ added more details about the programme, asking the group to read the document and provide feedback. He also talked about the flexibility of this programme and potential way forward. <p>Comments and Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SE said that business needs help with measuring social impact and asked if there is a specific theme for social enterprises.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RL wondered whether there was any scope, suggested having at least one cohort for the smaller businesses and recommended embracing the net zero agenda • AC strongly supported the proposal for peer-to-peer programme and asked whether they envisage having one cohort specifically for social entrepreneurs and social enterprises. • DR said is important is to really maintain a networking aspect of this particular programme because re. their cohort, this was something people really valued, learning from each other. • AR commented that social enterprises have a different legal structure, approach to risk and finance and hence suggested starting a separate peer to peer group.
6	Finance platform update and angels work update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EJ gave a brief saying they have been working on the finance platform now for about a six months in a small steering group as a recommendation by the Access to Finance Report that to create an online platform where businesses, prospective funders and professionals, finance professionals can meet and make connections. EJ added that they agreed to do that, to align with the launch of the British Business Bank's £200 million South West Fund, which is planned for June/ July. And so the steering group have been meeting and a Tech SW have been doing the work behind the scenes. • EJ described the platform as a body enabling participants to construct a space and evolve that space online; people who are using the platform can have specific chat areas for sectors or types of businesses as well as the big sort of forum where everyone can meet. He said that they are on track to have that for June. EJ added that promoting the platform will be a challenge- getting people and businesses to know about it and participate. And he challenged ways of doing this. EJ said another challenge is to work out an actual sustainable commercial model for the platforms so it can cover its own cost.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AC continued the discussion saying that the next big questions are around the longer term- how to sustain and develop the platform in the long term to drive enough engagement into the platform. EJ talked about recommendation around doing more to stimulate and nurture angel investors. He said that they have just commissioned a piece of work since there is quite a lot of support out there and explained the British business investments, which is a subsidiary, the British Business Bank have got £150 million from government, putting programmes together to grow angel investors across the UK. He said that a couple of the districts indicated that they might be interested in putting some shared prosperity fund into an angel's programme. EJ said it's still early to be definite so for now better to understand what's out there and then put a programme together. <p>Comments and Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SE shared a link (https://devonchamber.co.uk/business-support/finance-finder/?_ga=2.113667844.2040108491.1680790984-737637875.1652428841/) DR talked about their successful project with Devon County Council “Open Access programme” for entrepreneurs. PB said the platform sounds super exciting, adding that this has been one of the challenges for Tech start-ups raising money in the SW, so hopefully both these initiatives will plug this gap. He asked if they are going to do a Beta release before hand AR requested making sure the finance platform has a direct link to the growth hub. EJ promised to come back in summer with a further update and answers to all.
7	<p>AOBs-</p> <p>NA</p> <p><i>Next Meeting: 06 July, 14- 16:00</i></p>