

Present:

Richard Stevens (RS) – Chairman/ LEP Board member / Business Representative
(Citybus Ltd.)/ Chair

Stuart Elford (SE) – Devon & Plymouth Chamber of Commerce

Eifion Jones (EJ) – LEP Chief Operating Officer

Dolores Riordan (DRi) – Local Authority (Devon County Council)

Carmen Hanif (CH) – Business Body Representative/ (FSB- Devon)

Katriona Lovelock (KL) - Local Authority (Somerset County Council)

Adam Chambers (AC) – Business Representative (Smart Outcomes Limited)

Shaun Hoppins (SH) – Business Representative (S D Solution)

Dee Gill (DG) – Business Support Representative (Business Information Point)

Dirk Rohwedder (DR) – Business Representative (Dartington and Bristol School for
Social Entrepreneurs)

Julie Hawker (JH) - Business Representative (SWBC)

Paul Bird (PB) - Business Representative (Elixel)

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

Julia Blaschke (JuB) – Local Authority (Plymouth City Council)

Hadelzein Elobeid (HE) – Local Authority (Plymouth City Council)

Rob Evans – Local Authority (Devon County Council)

Heather Hillman (HH) - Attending Officer (Devon County Council)

Apologies:

Chris Wardman (CW) – General Dynamics UK Ltd

Noel Stevens (NS) – ESIF Committee Representative / Business Representative
(Alder King)

Amanda Ratsey (AR) – Business Theme Lead / Local Authority (Plymouth City
Council)

Guest Presenters:

Helen Hart (HeH)- LSIP/ Devon & Plymouth Chamber of Commerce

Dan Pritchard (DP)– Tech South West

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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),- Conflict of interest was declared by: SE, KL, JH, DR, DG, DRi (mainly on peer networks and Growth Hub)
2	Minutes and Actions of Last Meeting- Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Last meeting minutes were approved as a fair record of the last meeting.- Noted actions were: DH circulated the presentation re. funding options yet nothing yet has gone to the next stage.
3	LEP Transition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EJ talked about the Government announcement saying that information from government were published on the 4th of August with confirmation that they are stopping funding and sponsorships of LEPs from the end of March next year. He added that the note goes on to say is that they want to move LEP functions to upper tier or unitary authorities as soon as possible, consistent with the smooth transition.• EJ mentioned that the Government expect decisions on assets by the 31st of March, although it recognised that the actual transfer of things could take longer. He added that this is sort of the key milestone which sets out what those LEP functions are- which are listed as strategic economic planning (the local industrial strategy and more recently the build back better plan), business representation, delivery of functions on behalf of government, which includes things like growth hub and careers hub, and then it also says where appropriate to help broker or deepen the devolution deal- and this concludes the specific functions that the government set out in the guidance.• EJ then moved on to talk about practicalities and how it starts to look in the HotSW area; saying that it is complicated because as a LEP, there are

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	<p>local growth funds or growth deals and about 3 1/2 million of projects still spending next year. EJ added that there is some unspent money which is being allocated at the moment, so next year, HotSW LEP will be carrying forward several million pounds worth of growth deal or local growth from projects that will need managing- all due to spend by December 2024. The biggest of those is connecting Devon and Somerset, which is providing funding towards a broadband roll- out of super-fast broadband which is about £3,000,000 or so on its own.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• EJ mentioned that there is also the growing places loan fund which is currently lent out to places like Exeter Science Park and Oceansgate- whose repayments that run through to September 2029. He talked about the things that are not mentioned by Government in that list which include all the transformational sectors' work, then added that over the next few months as they develop the transition plan, they will need to set out which of those things move across to local authorities and when as well as what happens with some of the other things. EJ added that another complicating factor is the asset lock; given the fact that LEPs are a CRC.• EJ talked about a LEP meeting in January which would probably start to look at some decisions around when and where some of those functions go to. He then moved on to talk about the role of BLG in all this; saying that this group's performs a valuable function in particular with helping shape things like finance platform and some of the growth hub plans, help in guiding inward investment decisions... etc. EJ concluded that people may have a view on where this group goes in the future as well as the future home for the Growth Hub.• RS said he was worried about not having a combined authority because in the absence of a LEP and a combined authority then all of this will fold into the upper tier authorities which until now do not have clear interface for the business voice to be heard. He added that there is a need to just make sure that in any transition arrangement, business is well and truly anchored into the decision making and influencing at the right level, and not just in consulting.
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4	Programmes' Updates
	<p><u>Growth Hub:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DH gave a Growth Hub update in which he reminded audience about the model, engagement platform and the funnel. He also talked in detail about the access to finance links, funding searches and the initial diagnostic advice and guidance.• DH talked about the in- house services including the digital business support. He added more information on investment in digital skills support. JH asked DH about when would funding end and he answered that this project will end in December 2024.• DH asked RE to explain PROSPER. RE said that this programme will work across East Devon, Exeter and mid Devon working with BIP and Cosmic to deliver the support. He mentioned that so far there has been some confusion from businesses since the offer is not as wide geographically as it was before and also the fact that they are quite used to not having a patchwork of support. RE concluded that they are hoping that this sort of programme and the similar programmes that will be coming along shortly, funded by the UKSPF.• DH moved forward to discuss engagement, inquiries and referral rates. He concluded his presentation talking about the Growth Hub presence in a couple of upcoming events. <p>(For more information about Growth Hub stats; please see the attached BLG Update which features quarterly dashboards of the Growth Hub)</p> <p><u>Inward Investment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CM explained the ERDF project has now ended, reminding all of the circulation of the summative assessment. She added that they awarded 4 grants; all the businesses reported positive revenue increases, which has led to 14 new jobs being created. Unfortunately, these targets are below but there were lots of external factors that impacted such as COVID and the cost of living crisis. Importantly, the businesses were successful.

- CM talked about the internationalisation fund which was managed by the Department for Business and Trade which also ended now. That was comprising grants of up to £9000 to support exporting activity across HotSW where 116 businesses received a grant.
- CM mentioned that she was with the science parks and innovation centres across the area on a grant scheme for them to purchase some capital equipment to support their current and future tenants. She elaborated about EPIC and Plymouth Science Park which were subject to some assessment and have been successful to date, while Somerset and Exeter Science Parks have been working on their applications.
- CM said that she was also working with the Great SW, in the process of compiling an internationalisation strategy to focus on how to improve and that it would include investment, export and potentially international tourism across the great Southwest area.
- Last update from CM was that she has been leading on a dedicated inward investment service for Somerset; they now have a brand new website, they have just launched an ambassador scheme and signed up 10 new ambassadors.
- SE offered support, especially from their international trade team and CM welcomed the offer and suggested sharing the report for review and feedback once it is out.

Launch of the access to finance platform:

- DP talked about the project being a HotSW LEP- led project to help companies around business funding and finance, and rather than just a sort of static solution; elaboratively: how to encourage peer-to-peer learning bits as well as help finding a place where signposting can happen, and how the platform can complement what's already out there in terms of the growth hub and other things as well.
- DP then ran a live demonstration of the platform and walked audience through how it works, the different functions and facilities while highlighting the community atmosphere the platform promotes.

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(For more information, please see www.accesstofinancesw.co.uk)

- EJ added that the platform was funded to the end of March and then what happens after that needs to be worked out as part of the transition stuff as well- need for a more sustainable footing.
- PB commended the platform and promised to promote it through Digital Plymouth members.

Peer Networks:

- CB gave a recap, talking about the process to engage delivery partners and then where it was with the actual networks at the moment. He gave a background about how peer networks was a programme that the LEP ran, funded by BEIS in 2020, challenged by covid then picking up afterwards. CB reminded BLG members of their feedback and advice back in 2022 when the programme ended and there was some identified funding remaining, then later how it was agreed to run a peers network programme for this year.
- He then talked about setting the scene; looking at running six networks and working with the accountable body for the LEP- Somerset Council Which went out to do procurement. Also, the team approached a number of organisations asking if they would be delivery partners. CB added that they eventually got 5 organisations engaged and a potential of a 6th. He talked about the delivery partners in details: the chamber, SW Manufacturing Advisory Services, University of Exeter, School for Social Entrepreneurs, and Somerset Chamber of Commerce. The window for delivery for all will be closed by March. CB concluded that there is still room for one and highlighted the need to mobilise this forward.
- DG, JH, KL and DRi all supported the chamber taking up a second group.

Angels Network Proposal:

- EJ reminded audience about the previously circulated paper then gave a background. He said that another recommendation of the Access to Finance Report was around strengthening the support around angel

	<p>investing in this part of the world- providing quite a lot of evidence from British Business Bank, UK Business Angel Association and so on, which shows that once south of Bristol, angel investors as individuals and angel networks are significantly weaker than other parts of the country to the detriment of startup and early stage businesses. He added that the proposal came from Tech SW, seeking £36,330 from HotSW along with other partners, including the British Business Bank, who agreed to finance it as well. The programme will create 68 places on the UK Business Angel Association's scheme for identifying and nurturing prospective angel investors (40 across the area). EJ added that the funding will <i>all</i> come from growth hub cluster monies (there is a mistake on the paper).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• EJ sought support of BLG having oversight of the Growth Hub for years and attending BLG members recorded its support.
5	Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HeH gave a progress update on LSIP, presenting about the four stages of developing the plan and its whereabouts now. These four stages include communicating with employers, collating findings and creating LSIP reports and action plans.• She moved forward to talk about the methodology used in the Employer Engagement and Research which included surveys, open forums and discussions, then she talked about the key economic sectors which were covered. <p>(Please see attached presentation for further details about findings.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HeH discussed the key priorities for employers which include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Communication: current and future workforce- Flexibility & Responsiveness- Infrastructure & Technology

6	<p>AOBs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- RS gave a brief presentation about the IFS report (for more details see pertinent document attached to the minutes).- The group acknowledged PM’s leaving BLG then expressed gratitude to EJ and wished him very good luck in his new endeavour. <p><i>Next Meeting: 08 February 2024- 10am to 12</i></p>
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