

LIVERPOOL CITY REGION LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

At a meeting of the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership held via Telephone Conference on Thursday, 26th March, 2020 the following Members were

PRESENT

Mr A Hamid MBE, Chairperson of the Board
Paul Corcoran
Professor Dame Janet Beer
Elaine Bowker
Chris Fry
Councillor Pat Hackett
Dr Jonathan Hague
Dr Liz Mear
Laura Pye
Angela White OBE
Metro Mayor S Rotheram

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mick Allen, BEIS
Mark Basnett, Managing Director, LCR LEP
Mark Bousfield, Director of Commercial Development and Investment, LCR Combined Authority
Jill Coule, Monitoring Officer, LCR Combined Authority
Tony Reeves, Chief Executive, Liverpool City Council
Frank Rogers, Chief Executive, LCR Combined Authority
Tony Wade, Finance Director, LCR LEP

APOLOGIES

Mayor J Anderson OBE
Mike Hulme
Mark Whitworth

399. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman highlighted the importance of declaring interests and sought any Declarations of interest from Board Members.

No Declarations of interest were submitted by Board Members.

400. LEP CHAIR POSITION

Paul Corcoran, Vice Chair of the LCR LEP, reported that the term of office for Mr Asif Hamid MBE, Chair of the LCR LEP had ceased. Accordingly, Mr Corcoran proposed that Mr Asif Hamid MBE be appointed as the LCR LEP Chair for a further 3 year term.

This was unanimously agreed by the Board.

Mr Asif Hamid MBE thanked the Board for appointing him as Chair.

401. COVID-19 RESPONSES

Mr Asif Hamid MBE, Chair of the LCR LEP Board, thanked Board Members for their participation in the meeting. He advised that this meeting would focus on the impacts of Covid-19 on the City Region and Board Members would be provided with an opportunity to provide a summary of the key activities and issues their organisation was addressing.

Tony Reeves, Chief Executive of Liverpool City Council and Chair of the Merseyside Resilience Forum reported that the Forum would be using a plan which was based on the flu pandemic plan and was complex. The plan would focus on managing the health response focusing on prevention and mitigation and ensuring there was sufficient capacity to support demand on services. For Liverpool City Council, the focus was on ensuring that the social care function could support residents leaving hospital to provide capacity within the hospital setting. Work was also being undertaken to support those residents who had significant underlying health issues.

Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram, LCR Combined Authority, wished to place on record his thanks to Tony Reeves and each of the Local Authorities for the work they are carrying out in supporting residents during the pandemic. He explained that the LCR Combined Authority was working on a number of different initiatives to support the business community within the City Region. The first LCR Covid-19 Action Group meeting had been held which included representatives from MPs from across the City Region, Merseyside Police, Local Authorities, the LCR LEP and other key stakeholders. The meeting aimed to co-ordinate activity in response to the pandemic and to start preparing to support the recovery now.

Professor Dame Janet Beer, Vice-Chancellor of The University of Liverpool, reported that the University had been planning its response from January. She advised that all teaching was now online and the University was supporting the response by facilitating testing, assisting with vaccine development and loaning equipment to the NHS. The British Medical Council had agreed that those medical students who were due to graduate in the summer could be fast tracked to support front line services. The University was also providing car parking for NHS staff and some student accommodation had also been made available to those NHS staff who had to isolate.

Professor Dame Janet Beer outlined some of the financial implications which the University was considering as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, students had been advised that assessments would still continue but would be online.

Professor Dame Janet Beer set out some of the financial concerns students were facing, such as being able to pay their rent when they had lost their incomes. As such a joint letter from herself and the Vice Chancellor of Liverpool John Moore's University had been sent to private landlords, encouraging them to be understanding of students' financial circumstances during this period. The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE advised that where Landlords had participated in the Government's Buy to Let Scheme this enabled them to take a mortgage holiday. He undertook to share this information with Professor Dame Janet Beer.

Elaine Bowker, Principal and Chief Executive of The City of Liverpool College, reported that the College had also moved all its teaching to online which was working well for the majority of students. However, the Apprenticeship Programme was experiencing significant challenges and the advice from Government was not constructive. With regards to the Apprenticeship Programme, Elaine Bowker explained that the majority of apprenticeships operated in the hospitality and

construction industries, which had been directly impacted by the Coronavirus. Apprenticeships had either been terminated, or where they continued, it was proving difficult for the assessor to go on site as both the employer and professional bodies were refusing access. The nature of the apprenticeship programme also made it difficult to assess work online.

Further clarity was also required on the future funding of the apprenticeship programme. Highlighting that if apprenticeships were not available due to the economic impact of coronavirus would the Government continue to provide funding to colleges. The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE, requested that Elaine Bowker prepare a briefing note setting out the challenges facing the Apprenticeship Programme and this be shared with himself and the Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram (SR), who could then bring this information to the attention of Central Government.

Dr Jonathan Hague provided a summary of Unilever's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Unilever was extending cash relief to SME's and donating cleaning products to support the global effort. He explained that a three tier cleaning regime was in operation across the organisation. The manufacturing of essential items was still continuing. This meant that the Port Sunlight factory was running at increased demand to produce cleaning materials and hand sanitisers. The Research and Development site had been relocated to home working and labs remained open to support the factory operation. Furthermore, there was a concentrated effort on developing innovations to contain or provide a cure for Covid-19.

Dr Hague went on to explain that a risk to future production was a reduced workforce and suggested the possibility of other factories considering the redeployment of employees to support the production of essential products. Furthermore, Unilever was working in conjunction with smaller companies to scale up the capacity to make testing kits and packaging. The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE, asked that the information on the three tier cleaning regime be shared with the Board, as this may assist other businesses.

The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE, welcomed the suggestion of volunteers and employees being redeployed to support other factories and requested that Dr Hague explore this further in conjunction with Tony Reeves and Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram.

Laura Pye explained that the biggest concern for the visitor economy related to cash flow, particularly for freelancers who relied on SME business. She also highlighted that where businesses had approached banks to access the Government loans scheme they were being asked to provide personal guarantees which they were not in a position to provide. The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE, requested that specific examples of this be provided to him so the information could be reported back directly to the Treasury. Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram also suggested that the information be shared with Alison McGovern MP as she was also co-ordinating this information to be shared with the Treasury.

Laura also reported that hotels across the City Centre had either closed or were being used for NHS staff, some had also donated their food supplies to foodbanks.

Dr Liz Mear, Chief Executive of the Innovation Agency, explained the Agency's role in supporting the response to the pandemic. This involved supporting patient care by rolling out new processes for supporting deteriorating patients in acute, community and care home settings and ensuring medicine compliance for vulnerable groups to ensure they can stay in a community setting.

A procurement of digital outpatients and digital primary care systems had been undertaken nationally and digital consultation systems would be rolled out over the next 3 to 4 weeks across all NHS organisations. The two biggest primary care digital health providers were adapting their systems and these would also be rolled out in the next 3 to 4 weeks.

Funding was also being made available to support the digitisation of secondary care to support GPs, provide remote social care and mental health support such as self-management tools. The Innovation Agency would be supporting local companies to apply for this funding and was also assessing the products received into the funding call. A further competition would be held to fund new technology to combat the effects of social isolation and the Innovation Agency would also be supporting local businesses to apply for this fund. The technology was intended to support those who may be most affected by the consequences of remaining housebound for long periods of time.

The Innovation Agency was also working with the Cheshire and Mersey Health Care Partnership and the Merseyside Resilience Forum to establish a Covid-19 product assessment service to triage, signpost and deploy solutions from businesses.

Dr Jonathan Hague welcomed the opportunity to work in conjunction with The Innovation Agency to support the development of testing kits.

Paul Corcoran, Vice Chair of the LCR LEP, explained the impact on the digital and creative technology sector. He indicated that businesses could adapt quickly to enable employees to work from home, however, for the creative sector this was harder to achieve. He emphasised the importance of Government providing rapid support to small businesses and also ensuring that invoices were paid promptly. He also indicated that digital businesses had been more resilient than most during this crisis and that Growth Platform had a key role to play in the future absorption of technology for SMEs for future resilience and effectiveness.

Paul also advised the Board that many businesses within the digital and creative sector did not have a dedicated HR function and as a consequence were uncertain about the implications and processes for furloughing staff. Many businesses had responded quickly to adapting from a face to face operation to online, InnovateHer was one example who were able to offer their training provision online. However, this took time and required a good cash flow. He noted that the changes in working practises had embedded a strong digital infrastructure which may lead to a re-imagination of what organisations within the sector would look like.

In conclusion, Paul emphasised the importance of ensuring Government funding was available to support small businesses and ensure the sustainability of jobs and future employment opportunities.

Chris Fry confirmed that there was a great deal of confusion and uncertainty for businesses to try and work through the consequences and plan for future growth. He explained that businesses required capital injections rather than grants from Government. The grant schemes which had been made available were challenging for businesses to navigate. Furthermore, the financial support announced by the Government was a lengthy process and there was evidence that the banking sector was making it difficult for businesses to access the funding. He also reported that the furlough scheme did not support those SMEs who wished to retain their staff.

Mark Bousfield, Director of Commercial Development and Investment, LCR Combined Authority, explained that the initial analysis showed that £1 billion a month was required to support businesses in the City Region. Regular feedback was being provided to Government on the implications of the schemes that they had announced.

Angela White OBE explained how the community and voluntary sector were responding to the pandemic. She explained that there had been a rapid move towards remote working, however, there was concern amongst the sector regarding the continuation of funding. To provide re-assurance to the sector it was requested that Local Authorities and other public bodies provide 'comfort letters' to confirm that funding would continue and their cash flows would not be adversely impacted. Angela informed the Board that there was currently no direct package of support available to the sector from Government. Angela thanked Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham for launching the LCR Cares Fund which would support the work of the sector and also reported that the Morgan Foundation had committed £1m for 12 weeks to the sector.

Angela explained that the sector was experiencing a reduced number of volunteers, as many of the volunteers were in the over 70 age category and had to self-isolate and suggested that consideration be given to re-deploying staff to support the voluntary and community sector. She also highlighted that there was real concern for vulnerable people in the community, particularly those who weren't able to access digital technologies. To address this the sector was co-ordinating telephone support and a befriending service for the vulnerable. Angela also highlighted the long term issues associated with anxiety and mental health which maybe affecting residents. In conclusion, she encouraged Board Members to support the LCR Cares Fund as this may alleviate some of the funding reductions charities were experiencing and to also consider how their organisations could deploy staff to work as volunteers or provide logistical support.

The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE, asked that Angela provide a summary for the Board explaining how the business community could support the community and voluntary sector.

Tony Reeves suggested that the LCR Combined Authority give consideration to re-purposing SIF monies to support businesses in the City Region. He also stressed the importance of encouraging Government to be radical in their deployment of funds and suggested that the PAYE or National Insurance contributions could be utilised to provide businesses with an immediate cash injection.

Frank Rogers, Chief Executive, LCR Combined Authority, reported that as part of the M9 meetings of Mayor's and Chief Executives the points raised by the Board were being reported directly to Government officials. There had been an extensive challenge to Government regarding the importance of providing businesses with rapid cash flow injections.

Councillor Pat Hackett, Leader of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, explained that Parliament was due to approve emergency powers legislation for Local Authorities and the Council was reflecting this within its decision making structures, which would mean that the decision making meetings could be held remotely.

He explained that the priority for the Council was the preservation of life and as part of this food parcels and medicine were being distributed to the vulnerable and those who had been identified as having significant health complications which required

them to self-isolate for 12 weeks, there were between 6,000-8,000 residents who were in this category.

Support was being provided to Arrowse Park Hospital to enable the hospital to free up beds where this was appropriate to do so. Business rates would be halted for 12 months to support the business community across the borough, reductions had also been made to the Council Tax exemption scheme. The Council was providing some support to the self-employed.

Guidance was anticipated from Government on the support available for the homeless and rough sleepers, it was imperative that the Local Authority understood where they were sheltering. Councillor Hackett, explained that the Council was involved with the Merseyside Resilience Forum and regular briefings were also taking place with local MPs.

In response to the concerns about the slow release of funds to the business community, Mick Allen, BEIS, explained that they had been raised by M9 and he would also reflect them back to Government. He also noted the issues relating to the Apprenticeships Programme and indicated that so far this issue had not been highlighted and undertook to raise this. In conclusion, he emphasised that banks should not be asking for personal guarantees from businesses who were applying to the Government's grant scheme.

Mark Basnett, Managing Director, LCR LEP, explained that Growth Platform was repurposing staff to support businesses in the City Region. A helpline was also being launched to provide a broker service for businesses to provide them with practical guidance and access to support. Legal guidance would also shortly be made available too. He explained that a weekly survey was being distributed to 12,000 businesses across the City Region to understand the issues they were facing, one of which was issues with the supply chain. He advised that the insight gained from the survey would be shared with Board Members. There would also be increased business support information available on the Growth Platform website. He emphasised the importance of working collaboratively to support businesses across the City Region.

Mark Bousfield emphasised the importance of communication and collaboration and requested that each Board Member share and coordinate their messages which were going into Government. He also suggested that white label guidance for business from key organisations such as MSIF be made widely available.

The Chair, Asif Hamid MBE, thanked Board Members for their engagement and contribution.

Minutes 399 to 401 be received as a correct record on the 21st day of May 2020.

Chairperson of the Board