



Staffordshire Leaders Board

Economic Growth Programme Update

9th March 2023

1. Summary

- 1.1. Over the past year, the Leaders Board has agreed to progress several pieces of work with the aim of achieving the local authorities shared economic ambitions. These include projects considering the opportunities for the development of the green economy, the joint promotion of our Levelling Up Fund bids to Government and the creation of an economic growth pipeline, detailing the vast number of projects and programmes either being delivered or planned for delivery across the county.
- 1.2. This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Leaders Board and supporting officer groups over the past year, projects and programmes that are currently ongoing, as well as providing a look to the year ahead.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Staffordshire Leaders Board:
 - a. Note the work already undertaken by the Leaders Board and supporting officer groups, including successes in helping to secure investment in the county.
 - b. Consider and comment upon the progress being made on the many shared projects and programmes outlined within the report that are being progressed jointly by the Staffordshire local authorities.

3. Background

- 3.1. Outlined below is a summary of some of our main economic growth projects and programmes that have been completed over the last year, are already in progress or will commence over the coming year. These projects and programmes are aligned to and will play an important part of the delivery of both our Economic Vision and Priorities and emerging Employment and Skills Strategy.
- 3.2. **Levelling Up Fund Round 2 (LUF2)** – Prior to LUF2, the Staffordshire local authorities had already secured over £130 million in investment through the Future High Streets Fund, Town Deals and LUF round one for town centres across the county. The Leaders Board undertook work to promote further bids for





LUF2, highlighting the strength of our proposals and alignment across the county in what we wanted to achieve. This helped to secure a further £17.1 million for Leek town centre, and £20 million for investment in our transport infrastructure, including enabling improved and greener access to our town centres.

- 3.3. Including Shared Prosperity Fund and the forthcoming Rural England Prosperity Fund, over £200 million of government investment has been secured and the local authorities continue to work tirelessly to deliver projects and programmes utilising this funding.
- 3.4. **Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) ‘Grand Challenges’** – Rather than attempting to focus on a broad range of issues and spreading resource thinly, the Leaders Board is recommending that the Local Enterprise Partnership focuses on a small number of key economic issues for the local area in the coming year. These are the green economy, innovation, and a focus on an important local industrial sector.
- 3.5. As the green economy has already been agreed as a key priority and we have already undertaken a significant amount of joint work on this issue, our suggestion is that this is considered by the LEP as the priority. Our expectation is that the LEP will engage with businesses on this to seek their views on the impacts and opportunities of Net Zero and climate reduction targets, including what support businesses believe can and should be provided by local government.
- 3.6. A specification for this work is currently in development and will be circulated to the Economic Growth Directors Group for comment prior to agreement by the Leaders Board. This specification will then be used to commission the LEP to undertake the work as part of their primary remit to provide the business voice for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
- 3.7. **Economic Growth Pipeline** - The development of a pipeline of priority economic growth projects was identified as one of the top priorities in supporting the future development of the Staffordshire economy. This was for several reasons including to provide a clear picture of the priorities across the county and allow us to speak with one voice, to consider and help to address any issues related to our ability to access funding streams and to identify joint projects that have the potential to have significant benefit to the local economy.
- 3.8. The Economic Growth Directors Group completed the initial pipeline, and this has remained under review. It was clear from this work that most projects were either in train, awaiting decisions or in need of further consideration before they are able to progress.
- 3.9. There was therefore an opportunity to progress some projects that have the potential to be transformational for the local economy, and it was agreed that innovation, new science park(s) and the green skills would be the priorities. The





green skills work is initially being progressed through the Employment and Skills Plan, whilst discussions are underway on the work related to innovation. The Economic Growth Directors Group will have oversight of these projects and progress will be reported to the Leaders Board as appropriate.

- 3.10. **Investment Prospectus** – Our first Investment Prospectus, produced towards the beginning of 2022, proved to be hugely successful in highlighting the significant number of key investment opportunities across the county. These include a broad range of developments, from smaller town centre schemes to large scale employment sites. These types of developments have been hugely successful in generating employment opportunities and attracting investment from world-renowned companies into the county in recent years.
- 3.11. Investment opportunities will of course change, and the Investment Prospectus has already become an integral part of our marketing, including at events attended by major investors and developers such as the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum. We are therefore in the process of updating Investment Prospectus, and this will be circulated to the Leaders Board for consideration and agreement.
- 3.12. **Spatial Planning** - An initial high-level review of the Staffordshire Spatial Planning Services was agreed as an action by the Staffordshire Leaders Board at its Autumn meeting. This included how we may be able to develop a more efficient and joined up approach to planning in Staffordshire, seeking consistency across policies, sharing of resources and a common strategic approach to planning.
- 3.13. This was further discussed by the Economic Growth Directors Group in February, and it was suggested that the work focus upon:
 - An audit of current resources and skills to identify gaps and opportunities for shared resources.
 - Consideration of a mechanism for sharing transformation / efficiencies developed across the local authorities.
 - Review of the need for the commissioning evidence and the case for doing this jointly to reduce costs.
 - Review of strategic policy areas that could be developed together.
 - Review Highways Development Control capacity / issues in terms of timeliness of responses.
- 3.14. With agreement of the Leaders Board, this work will continue to be progressed by the Economic Growth Directors Group and will report back as appropriate. As well as considering the service delivery issues outlined above, we will also consider any innovative approaches to joint delivery that could create benefits for the local authorities.





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