

OxLEP Board Meeting
11th June 2024
5.00pm – 8.00pm

VENUE
MS Teams

MINUTES

Board Directors Present:	Alistair Fitt (Chair - AF), Nigel Tipple (NT), Ariana Adjani (AA), Cllr David Rouane (DR), Cllr Bethia Thomas (BT), Angus Horner (AH), Alexander Reip (AR) (left early), Peter Nolan (PN), Jayne Norris, (JN), Rachel White (RW), Stephen Gifford (SG), Jacqui Canton (JC) and Cllr Susan Brown (SB)
Board Directors Apologies:	Jenifer Schivas (JS), Cllr Liz Leffman (LL), Andy Graham (AG), , Miranda Markham (MM), Lorna Baxter (LB)
Minutes:	Sadie Patamia (SP)
In attendance:	Richard Byard (RB), Sally Andreou (SA), Rob Panting (RP), Helen Ryan Wallis (HRW), Sarah Marlow (SM), Kathy Wilcox (KW) Cllr David Hingley (DH)
Item	Action/Responsible
Item 1 – Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest	
AF welcomed all to the meeting and introduced DH, the new Leader of Cherwell DC noting his nomination to join the Board. Apologies were accepted from - Jenifer Schivas (JS), Cllr Liz Leffman (LL), Andy Graham (AG) and Lorna Baxter (LB)	
Item 2 – Minutes	
To approve	Approved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board meeting dated 12th March 2024 	
To note	Noted, with JN's name to be corrected in apologies for NPC meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominations and Personnel Committee minutes (May 2024) • Draft Finance and Audit Committee minutes (May 2024) 	
Items for Decision – Confidential Papers for approval as detailed Committee/Sub-Group recommendation (Exempt Information¹)	
Item 3a - Financial outturn report and carry forward budget approval (for approval)	
Item 3b - Capital Programmes update (for information)	
Item 3c - Internal Controls Review outcome (for information)	
Item 3d - Forward workplan (for approval)	
Item 3e - Board Succession (for approval)	
Item 4 - Transition Plan Update	
Item 5 - Questions from the public arising from the agenda (Max 3mins per question – notified in advance in writing)	
There were no members of the public present	
Item 5 - Social Contract update presentation	
SM and SA provided an update on the work and achievements of the Skills Team's Social Contract Programme which is a £1.7 million fund supported by the Containment Outbreak management Fund administered by from Oxfordshire County Council. The focus of the programme being to support communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. It targets groups that have faced	

unemployment, barriers to education and training, and health inequalities.

The programme is focused upon:

- Supporting apprenticeships (Starts and completions,
- Development of Community Employment Plans,
- Development of our labour market dashboard,
- Support for “Skills Boot Camps”,
- And a grow your own scheme.

These strands aim to create accessible, quality employment opportunities, to unlock the potential of the apprenticeship levy and remove barriers to apprenticeship completions.

The programme works with stakeholders and partners to provide support and advice to those furthest from the labour market, those who seek support through food larders, and initiatives aimed at supporting young people. These programmes include our “No Limits” programme, a virtual mentoring platform and development of the OXMe website [OXME.INFO | For young people in Oxfordshire](https://www.oxme.info) .

SM provided a detailed update on the achievements of the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Team which has secured pledges totalling in excess of £3.5 million of apprenticeship levy from 44 businesses which has supported almost 200 apprenticeships in various sectors across the county which without the levy pledge funding would not have been possible. .

She reflected upon some of the common issues that businesses face in starting and completing apprenticeships, such as misconceptions in respect of complexity, funding availability, quality of training and working with the digital account system. She described how the advisors of the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Service (OXLEP Skills) help businesses to overcome these challenges.

The presentation highlighted that the apprenticeship levy pledge process has had a demonstrable impact, increasing apprenticeship starts in Oxfordshire by nearly 20%. Noting the focus of the funding is towards lower-level apprenticeship starts in support of future careers and priority skills sectors in the county such as the Domiciliary Care sector. Finally reflecting upon the positive case studies and feedback. Citing examples such as the NHS Trusts in the County. SM urged the board individually and through their advocacy, their networks, the positive impact of the apprenticeship levy pledge programme. Noting that should we not allocate the funds pledged within the 2-year eligibility period, unallocated funds will be recovered by treasury into the general funds and lost to the county.

AR asked if any business, including social enterprises/charities could access the Apprenticeship Levy. SM confirmed they could and encouraged him to get in touch with the Skills Team to discuss how they could advise and assist.

More generally, SM noted that that apprenticeship completions had increased, reaching 95% of the pre-pandemic level, and that the number of Apprenticeship Ambassadors continues to grow with the current number reaching 29.

She went on to highlight the value of Community Employment Plans (CEP's). Explaining that CEP's aim to address skills and labour market mismatches by supporting local job

creation, skills development, and social value/procurement associated with strategic developments across the County. In summary, the CEP programme has to date supported 35 community employment plans across the county, 52 apprenticeships, 800 hours of volunteering, and engaged 52 businesses in the programmes.

SM then precede the No limits programme: This is a social contract initiative that supports individuals who are furthest from the labour market, through triage workers, bursaries, and support with access to digital devices. The programme has supported over 500 people, including 63 refugees, and helped 80 individuals to progress into employment. SM stated that the programme has been extended for six months and the team are bidding for further funding noting the impact this programme has had to date.

SA also commented that the programme had been hugely important and successful and that there is a desire to continue the programme until March 2025, with the hope of securing UKSPF funding.

Finally, SM highlighted the OxGROW programme. This is an online platform for Oxfordshire residents who are 18 plus and need support to move into employment or training. It connects “mentees” with volunteers from the business community who can support and engage with individuals, utilising a text messaging system to respond to requests for advice and guidance.

SM stated that OxGROW programme helps mentees to gain confidence, build personal resilience and understanding of the labour market in Oxfordshire and the opportunities it can afford. It also supports learning modules on topics such as CV development, interview preparation, and career planning. It currently has 21 volunteers supporting the programme noting mentees can self-refer or be signposted by various trusted organisations. These include the Job Centre, the prison service, or employment hubs. She asked that any potential mentors could be referred to the Skills team to express their interest and availability.

RB thanked the board for backing the social contract programme, which was a leap of faith at the time, and praised the team for delivering a responsive and targeted programme. He also highlighted the success of the apprenticeship levy programme, which he confirmed provides funding for SMEs and charities/social enterprises to access apprenticeships in their organisations and urged the Board to spread the word. He also mentioned the potential policy changes which could allow more flexibility in using the levy for skills and training alongside apprenticeship starts.

RB noted that the social contract programme offers person-centred support for individuals who face barriers to training and employment, by supporting the refurbishment of digital devices, travel bursaries, and childcare costs enabling people to engage and become employment ready. He reflected upon the status of the current programme, highlighting the funding “cliff edge” in March 2025, and that he is working to find a way to extend the programme working with partners and stakeholders.

Item 6 - Corporate Website Update

RP presented an update on the work of the Communication Team and current structure. He highlighted the communication strategy and objectives its objectives which were summarised as:

- Engaging and retaining a loyal audience,
- Showcasing the impact of the organisations programmes and services,
- And to position us as the delivery partner of choice ; a knowledgeable and effective partner across multiple sectors, programmes with a county wide reach.

He went on to describe many of the programme highlights such as work to optimise our web site visibility and social media growth locally, regionally and nationally. Matching content with the needs and interests of the target personas (our customers and communities of interest), to use data to optimize the content and to build a wider digital presence and community.

He then updated the Board on the Oxford Calling digital investment platform. Noting this was a new digital platform to promote the business innovation ecosystem of Oxfordshire and to attract talent and investment to the region. The platform is content driving supported by AI capability and original content from key partners, stakeholders and our own operational delivery.

He also updated the Board on the status of the new corporate website which is expected to be live in Q2. The new website has a contemporary and clean format, easier to navigate with a user-friendly layout, a better showcasing capability, highlighting the impact and role of the organisation and a clear brand identity. The corporate website hosts not just the Oxford calling platform but our two Business and Skills micro sites creating an simple platform to engage, communicate and inform. He described the opportunity to reinforce our position as a whole system delivery partner of choice.

Item 9 - Chief Executive's Report

NT presented his paper which reviewed progress throughout the last quarter. Providing an overview of the business planning, communications, business support, skills, Strategy and internationalisation work that the LEP has delivered, highlighting some of the achievements and challenges over the last quarter.

He highlighted a range of key achievement and notable updates:

The Growth Hub Teams excellent work in delivering EU/HMG and partner funded programmes including the successful close down and audit of our complex EU funded programmes in parallel. A fantastic achievement and testament to strong partnership working and delivery.

The Communications Team progress with the development of a new corporate website and the development of microsites for each of our three operational delivery programme of Business, Skills and Investment/Internationalisation.

Recent evidence given on behalf of OXLEP and the LEP network at a Skills for the Future Inquiry led by the House of Lords.

The work of the Strategy and Internationalisation team who not only had maintained our momentum in attracting and supporting inward investment, Trade and export opportunities in the wake of the EU-Exit and Covid-19 pandemic, but had once again surpassed its stretch targets for the number of investments, jobs created and capital value of the investment into Oxfordshire.

Finally updated the Board on the performance and impact of the various Capital Programmes and projects led by the team and overseen by SW. In doing so highlighted the progress towards achieving our investment, employment targets both created and safeguarded, the number of new learners assisted and other outcomes such as the number of ultra-fast broadband connections supported.

NT the reviewed the KPI performance to 13st March 2024 noting :

The skills programme has exceeded or met its targets and had a positive impact on young people, those returning to work, education or training and championing apprenticeships. Including exceeding the target number of schools and colleges, businesses and volunteers, and has secured over £2.7m of levy which represents an increase of £1m above target. In addition to consistently high standards of Gatsby benchmarks achieved with partner schools supporting careers guidance.

The business support programme delivered by the growth Hub has provided targeted and tailored support for businesses. The programme has exceeded the target number of referrals and triage cases and has used a cost-effective lead generation strategy. It has , created, supported or safeguarded 686 jobs, which is more than eight times the original programme target. The programme has also received consistently high levels of user/ business satisfaction, tracking at 99.3% against an industry benchmark of 80%. He confirmed that although some of the figures were much higher than the original targets, such as Jobs figures, that was a result of the change in methodology adopted by HMG which now requires consolidation of direct, indirect (supported) and safeguarded jobs reporting for instance.

Reflecting upon the performance of the strategy and internationalisation programme he noted we had exceeded the stretch targets: The programme secured 47 (34 target) inbound company investments, totalling 978 (640 target) jobs and £601m (£480m target) of investment, another outstanding performance and effort by the team working with the Department for Business and Trade.

Finally noting the communications team had increased the visibility and engagement of the company through various web based and social media channels/platforms: The programme has achieved a 2% increase in followers quarter on quarter, and a reduced cost of £0.55p per click through on lead generation down from £2:50, and a 99.15% business satisfaction rate. He also drew attention to the podcast, thought leadership and YouTube communication channels, noting that although the activity had slowed during the transition period, accounting for reduced KPI performance measures are in place to accelerate communications following the successful transition on the 1st April 2024.

Recommendation -

That the Board notes:

- **The latest Q 1 2024/25 reporting provides updates on key operational progress up to the March 2024 reporting cycle.**
- **The operational progress outlined in this report and supporting documents:**
Annex A -Team Updates presentation.
Annex B – KPI Reporting Summary Outturn as of 2023/24

Noted

The meeting closed at 7:30pm

DRAFT