	Minutes of Business Environment Subgroup Meeting 6 March 2023

Membership

Name of Member	Organisation	Attendance
Paddy Bradley (PB)	SWLEP CEO	✓
Tom Marshall (TM)	SWLEP	✓
Alison North (AN)	SWLEP Board Director	✓
Chris Stevens (CS)	SWLEP	✓
Prof Ian White (IW)	SWLEP Board Director	Apologies

Guest(s)	Jenna Hunt (JH), Cities and Local Growth Unit representative – joined at 12.45pm David Dewart (DD), Swindon Borough Council - Apologies Rachel Finlay (RFi) and Rory Bowen (RB) Wiltshire Council – joined at 12.28pm
Chair	Alison North (AN)
Minutes	Deborah House (DKH)
Venue	Via video / teleconference call
Start time	12 noon
Finish Time	2pm

1.0	Welcome and Introductions	Date
	The meeting opened at 12.02pm. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted.	
2.0	**Minutes and Matters Arising**	
	Minutes from the meeting of 18 January 2023 were approved. Matters Arising: • Action: PB and DS to discuss how the Subgroups operate together with a proposal for the Chairs of the Subgroups to meet with the Chair of the SWLEP and the CEO to look at current ways of working and what might need to change to help the SWLEP develop in these variable economic conditions. *Update: We await a final determination of the level of grant from Government for Growth Hub Core activities. PB and DS agreed to propose any modifications to the subgroup structure once finances are known. The meeting with Subgroup Chairs and the Chair of the SWLEP will be in the new financial year in April and would be finalised when we receive knowledge of funding etc.* • In order to keep the momentum going forward, a discussion to be arranged with AN, IW and PB before the next meeting of the Subgroup. DKH to liaise. *Update: meeting not yet held. It is hoped to fit in to the discussions in the point above on a future subgroup structure.*	

3.0	**The potential impact of technological developments on the world of work**	
	PB spoke to the paper on the potential impact of technological developments on the world of work. Comments made: • in the short-term technological advances led to increases in employment opportunities, but ultimately jobs at various levels would disappear over time. The industrial revolution reduced low level processing jobs etc, but it was likely that AI would reduce higher level jobs too. • ChatGBT– could replicate the style of any piece of writing given to it to analyse. The types of written material which could then be produced are endless. • the Body Shop had rejected technology in recruiting for entry level jobs and offered applicants three brief questions and the opportunity for a paid try out for a day in situ. If successful, they were offered the role. This had led to better diversity in the workplace; • Apps were bound up into our way of life without us even realising it and AI was tracking us across our systems; and • young people were used to using technology, but what was used in everyday life, may not be what businesses needed. **The Business Environment Subgroup:** **NOTED the contents of the report.**	
4.0	**Maintaining an oversight of government initiatives**	
	PB spoke to the paper on how the organisation maintained oversight of government initiatives. Comments made: • initiatives from Government must first obtain clearance from a Minister. However there had been a high churn in these roles which was very disruptive; • civil servants were supposed to offer continuity. However, The Treasury was a key policy department, but suffered from a high staff turnover. • the Departments of Trade and Education were also suffering from 15+% staff turnover; • this meant that institutional knowledge was not maintained; • the Department which had changed the most was that to do with business. And that was the one with which SWLEP had the most dealings; • SWLEP had good processes with the links to government with monthly calls with Cities & Local Growth Unit representatives, their attendance at Subgroup meetings and business engagement meetings, pre-board catch-up calls and fort-nightly calls also involving the Local Authorities; • the LEP Network also provided a regular Newsletter with any updates on pertinent Government activity;	

	• the regional Growth Hubs of SWLEP, Gfirst and WECA met every two weeks and issues were fed up the chain. Every two months there was also a National Group call; • RB added that they received a daily update from the Corporate Office on government policy; and • network groups such as the Business Intelligence & Network Group (BING) were important to inform people of developments. **The Business Environment Subgroup:** **NOTED the contents of the report.**	
5.0	**Business Cyber Centre performance report**	
	TM updated the meeting on the progress of membership, events held, and relationships forged at the Business Cyber Centre and the presentation can be accessed via the link below. https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/business-environment-subgroup---main-meeting/2023/06-march/20230306-swlep-bcc-bes-update.pdf?sfvrsn=55304384_3 TM advised of the opening of the BCC's new café, Franco's, which would be available for event catering, members and external customers. Thanks were given to Amy Wetherill, Marketing Executive, for producing the marketing collateral. TM also explained international activity with: • Global EPIC; • a programme to deliver virtual training with the team at Bath Spa University; and • the link to Ukraine refugees in other countries. **The Business Environment Subgroup:** **NOTED the contents of the report.**	
6.0	**Growth Hub performance report**	
	CS spoke to the meeting. • He advised that we were still awaiting the Growth Hub's core funding provision and were scenario planning accordingly. In any event, the aim was to retain staff headcount if possible. • The ERDF SME Competitiveness Programme's financial completion would be June this year, although programme activity would cease at the end of March. SWLEP had been in the last cohort for receiving European funding. • The Team was scenario planning what business support could look like after the programme close and this position was driving the Growth Hub Plus offer. • A Programme Change Request (PCR) had been prepared under C1 outputs as these had been significantly affected by COVID. However, it had been	

	advised that it was not necessary to submit a PCR, and this would not now proceed. **Action: CS to provide breakdown of the figures of SME Competitiveness programme in more detail at the next meeting.** **The Business Environment Subgroup:** **NOTED the contents of the report.**	**May 2023**
7.0	**Items for the next meeting**	
	TM advised that Franco's Café was holding an open day on 14 March as a taster session, and everyone was invited. PB presented one slide showing skills required in job adverts in the Swindon & Wiltshire area. The slide can be access by following the link below. https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/business-environment-subgroup---main-meeting/2023/06-march/swlep-labour-market-060323.pdf?sfvrsn=1491cd4c_3 The requirement for finance and auditing skills were consistently high, whereas marketing started the year as the skill with the highest demand, but this declined sharply during the year. This in part could be accounted for because of seasonality, but this skill requirement was also notoriously vulnerable to reduction when businesses were struggling, for example, with the latest cost of living crisis. PB had produced a profile of businesses in Salisbury for its Place Partnership and would be able to do the same for Swindon, Trowbridge and Chippenham as necessary.	
	Date and time of next meeting	
	Next meeting: Tuesday, 9 May 2023 – 1pm to 3pm Online via Teams **Future Dates for 2023:** Monday, 3 July 2023 – 1pm to 3pm Monday, 18 September 2023 – 1pm to 3pm Monday, 6 November 2023 – 2pm to 4pm Business Cyber Centre, Unit 7, Greenways Business Park, Chippenham, SN15 1BN	
	Meeting closed at 1.32pm	

Alison North   Chair BES-G

23 May 2023