

BERKSHIRE PROSPERITY BOARD

17 JUNE 2024

12.10 - 1.10 PM

Present:

Councillor Stephen Conway, Wokingham Borough Council
Councillor Denise Gaines, West Berkshire Council
Councillor Helen Purnell, Bracknell Forest Council
Councillor Dexter Smith, Slough Borough Council
Councillor Liz Terry, Reading Borough Council
Councillor Simon Werner, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

In Attendance:

Stephen Evans, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Nigel Lynn, West Berkshire Council
Will Tuckley, Slough Borough Council

Also Present:

Neil Allen, Wokingham Borough Council.
George Framallicco, Wokingham Borough Council
Rhian Hayes, Wokingham Borough Council
Stuart McKellar, Bracknell Forest Council
Shasta Parveen, Berkshire Prosperity Board
Charlie Stewart, Reading Borough Council

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Jeff Brooks
Councillor Mary Temperton
Susan Halliwell
Jackie Yates

1 Election of Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor Stephen Conway be elected Chair of the Board for the 2024/25 municipal year.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor Mary Temperton be elected Vice-Chair of the Board for the 2024/25 municipal year.

3 Pre-election Period

Prior to considering the business on the agenda, the Board was reminded that during the course of the meeting, to remain within the requirements of the law, councillors should refrain from making any statement that referred to a political party or parliamentary candidate and/or their policies in any way that either supported or attacked them.

4 **Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

5 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

6 **Terms of Reference**

The Board was invited to endorse the terms of reference which had been to each of the six councils for approval prior to its establishment.

The Board was advised that the chief executives would be keeping the terms of reference under review to ensure they remained fit for purpose. One issue already identified related to the implications for the quorum if a member declared an interest and withdrew from the meeting.

In response to a question about urgency provisions, Councillor Smith was advised that this would be looked into by the chief executives.

RESOLVED that the terms of reference of the Berkshire Prosperity Board be endorsed.

7 **Background to the Berkshire Prosperity Board and Priority Themes**

The Board received a presentation on the background to its establishment and the role that it was intended to play in driving growth and prosperity across Berkshire and beyond.

The presentation highlighted how working together, sharing common goals across a functional economic area would provide exciting new opportunities for collaboration on economic development and growth, providing more flexibility and influence than a single council would have on its own and enabling the six local authorities to speak with one voice. The focus of each of the following six workstreams was also highlighted:

- Education and skills
- Social, accessible and affordable housing
- Health and inequalities
- Strategic infrastructure
- Net zero
- Sector development

It also outlined plans to establish a business board in the autumn.

Councillor Conway thanked the officers for the many months of work to develop the workstreams. He stressed that more could be achieved together than on their own.

Councillor Smith suggested that as Reading and Slough were two of the prime destinations for asylum seekers from Afghanistan, the Board should be looking for further funding to support them.

Councillor Terry stated that all had had to reshape the way they looked at the economy due to the changes to the LEP. This work needed to sit in a strategic context. There was a need to state what it all meant and what would make a true difference to the residents. Berkshire had a great track record to build on. There was lots of work going on behind the scenes to identify the opportunities and work out the challenges which needed to be addressed within Berkshire.

Councillor Conway reiterated the enormous advantages of working together but also being sensitive to the variations across and within the boroughs. He highlighted the contradictions in the housing market which claimed that prices would come down with more building, but in reality, they just kept rising beyond the means of many. This meant that the local housing need was not met. The Board would be seeking to maximise the opportunities to bid together to deliver genuinely affordable housing. It could have a very practical impact and make a real difference.

The Board noted the presentation.

8 Berkshire Economic Strategy

The Board was briefed on the Berkshire Economic Strategy (BES). The LEP had been commissioned to develop the strategy within the first six months. The focus was on growth for the functional economic area, recognising the diversity of the different unitary areas. The aim was to drive productivity, prosperity and economic growth across Berkshire by:

- Setting out Berkshire's vision for a future sustainable and inclusive economy – achieving good growth with jobs for local people.
- Identifying Berkshire's competitive advantages and strengths and weaknesses.
- Pinpointing opportunities for investment by business and government.
- Highlighting the actions to stimulate enterprise and innovation.
- Informing local decision making.
- Providing evidence for bidding for future funds.

The BES was to be strategic and high level, a 10-year strategy showing how Berkshire could be even more competitive, accompanied by a five-year action plan setting out what would be done to deliver the BES and how progress would be measured. The main economic geography was to be Berkshire, but it would also go down to the level of each of the six unitary authorities.

Consultation on the draft BES would take place in September.

Councillor Conway thanked Alison Webster and George Framalocco for their presentation.

The Board noted the presentation and indicated that it was happy with the progress and the future work outlined.

9 Programme of Meetings

The Board noted that its next meeting was to be held at 12 noon on 16 September 2024. Further meetings were scheduled to take place at 12 noon on 16 December 2024 and 17 March 2025.