

## **BERKSHIRE PROSPERITY BOARD**

**16 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**12.10 - 1.20 PM**

### **Present:**

Councillor Stephen Conway, Wokingham Borough Council (Chair)  
Councillor Denise Gaines, West Berkshire Council  
Councillor Geoff Hill, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead  
Councillor Dexter Smith, Slough Borough Council  
Councillor Mary Temperton, Bracknell Forest Council  
Councillor Liz Terry, Reading Borough Council

### **In Attendance:**

Stephen Evans, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead  
Emma Gee, Reading Borough Council  
Susan Halliwell, Bracknell Forest Council  
Nigel Lynn, West Berkshire Council  
Will Tuckley, Slough Borough Council  
Susan Parsonage, Wokingham Borough Council  
George Framallicco, Wokingham Borough Council  
Rhian Hayes, Wokingham Borough Council  
Shasta Parveen, Berkshire Prosperity Board

### **Also Present:**

Alison Webster, Berkshire LEP

### **Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillor Jeff Brooks  
Councillor Simon Werner  
Jackie Yates

## **10 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 17 June 2024 were approved by the Board.

## **11 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair drew attention to the need to identify potential conflicts of interest in advance of the meeting as all six authorities needed to be present for there to be a quorum. He therefore suggested that if anyone was to have an interest in the future, they should bring a substitute to step in for the relevant item to avoid being inquorate.

## **12 Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

### 13 **Business Advisory Board - Introduction**

The Board discussed the establishment of the Business Advisory Board which it was intended would report to this Board. Membership was to be drawn from Berkshire's key industrial sectors, such as life sciences and agritech, creative and screen industries, IT and digital, visitor economy, retail and hospitality (high streets), and developers and construction. The Board should comprise between 15 and 20 members with five seats reserved for business representative organisations, with a seat each for the Berkshire LEP, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, University of Reading, further education colleges and Federation of Small Businesses. It was to meet quarterly. The first meeting was to be held in the week commencing 25 November 2024.

Nigel Lynn highlighted a number of key points in the report which had been circulated. He indicated that the government guidance stressed that it should provide a strong business voice. He outlined the approaches adopted by other areas which had been taken into account in developing the proposals for Berkshire's business board.

Amongst the points made were that:

- The period of membership was a matter for the Board, but three years had applied elsewhere with the possibility of an extension thereafter.
- There may be a need to reconsider the details once established in the light of experience.
- Commitment from the people on the Business Advisory Board would be key.
- Some councils already had an existing forum for business.

The Board endorsed the following proposals as set out in the report:

- The Board should comprise between 15 and 20 members;
- Five seats should be reserved for business representative organisations, with a seat each for the Berkshire LEP, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, University of Reading, further education colleges and Federation of Small Businesses.
- The Board should meet quarterly.
- The first meeting was to be held in the week commencing 25 November 2024.

### 14 **Devolution – Expression of Interest Letter**

The Board received a report advising it of the letter to be sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in response to their invitation to express an interest in devolution. It had indicated that the six authorities were well-positioned to begin formal discussions with the government on the most effective devolution model for Berkshire to benefit the county and the wider UK.

It was also proposed that the expression of interest should be accompanied by a statement emphasising Berkshire's significance to the national economy, its strengths, areas for growth and development, and the barriers that needed to be overcome. The Board agreed that the final wording of the letter and statement should be agreed with the Chair of the Prosperity Board in consultation with all Berkshire Leaders.

Councillor Terry advised that there were strong indications that deals were being done with those establishing mayors. Those opting not to pursue a mayoral arrangement were likely to

be a lower priority. Councillor Smith suggested that a strong economic case may attract the government's attention even if Berkshire did not want a mayor.

Subject to seeing the letter, the Board endorsed the proposal.

## 15 **Berkshire Economic Strategy**

The Board received an update on the development of the Berkshire Economic Strategy.

The Board was reminded that the purpose of the strategy was to drive productivity, prosperity and economic growth across the county. Alison Webster stressed the importance of linking the Strategy to the work on devolution. She stressed that the message from government was that economic growth was required to fund the improvements it was hoping to deliver. Growth was at the heart of rebuilding Great Britain. She also referred to the four headline themes:

Theme 1. Berkshire's Economic Performance

Theme 2. Berkshire's businesses

Theme 3. Berkshire's people

Theme 4. Berkshire's business environment

She also outlined the data that was being used to inform the strategy, including the consultation responses. The importance of an action plan to ensure that the strategy actually delivered what was intended was also stressed.

Amongst the points made were that:

- Consideration needed to be given as to how the Business Advisory Board would be engaged in the consultation.
- Innovation and research and development should be key.
- The Business Advisory Board would have a key role in delivering the strategy.
- The strategy would provide a good starting point for discussions with business.

The Board noted progress, particularly that the final version of the Strategy was to be presented to it on 16 December for endorsement, and endorsed the following:

- The proposed consultation timetable.
- That the four-week public consultation should commence on 22 October 2024.
- That the main consultation event should take place either on 8 or 15 November.

Alison Webster followed up the report with a brief summary of the state of the Berkshire economy. A detailed briefing was to be circulated to the Board.

## 16 **Date of Next Meeting**

The Board noted that its next meeting would be held at 12 noon on Monday 16 December 2024 in Slough.