

Suffolk Business Board: Minutes and Actions 28th May 2024

Board attendees

Name	Role and Organisation
Mark Pendlington	Chair
Oliver Paul	Director, Suffolk Food Hall
Lisa Perkins	Chair, Tech East
Peter Brady	CEO, Orbital Group
Kelly Boosey	Commercial Manager, Oxford Innovation
Leanne Gittins	Managing Director, LME Recruitment
John Dugmore	CEO, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Hannah Reid	CEO, Community Action Suffolk
Paul Ager	Divisional Port Manager, ABP
Gurpreet Jagpal	Pro Vice-Chancellor Business and Entrepreneurship, University of Suffolk
Nikos Savvas	CEO, Eastern Education Group
Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council
Richard Smith MVO	Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, Suffolk County Council
Ian Gallin	Chief Executive, West Suffolk Council
Neil MacDonald	Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
Andrew Mellen	Leader, Mid Suffolk District Council

Officer team attendees

Name	Role and Organisation
Jai Raithatha	Head of Economic Development, Suffolk County Council
Julian Munson	Head of Innovation & Sectors, Suffolk County Council
Michael Gray	Head of Skills, Suffolk County Council
Rob Hancock	Assistant Director, Suffolk County Council
Lucinda Boast	Executive Assistant, Suffolk County Council

Apologies

Tom Ball (Ipswich Town Football Club)

Doug Field (East of England Co-op)

Summary of Actions

Action	Owner
Business Board Terms of Reference – review again and revise process for the staggering of term lengths, and term lengths for education members.	Officer team and MP
Economic strategy sub topic – Skills. Sub group of Board members and officers to work up proposals for how skills shortfalls should be addressed in the economic strategy, and the link between roles of education and business further enhanced.	GJ, LG, NS with support from Michael Gray
Economic strategy sub topic – Productivity. Sub group of Board members and officers to work up initial proposals for how the Suffolk productivity gap could be closed as part of the economic strategy.	OP, with support from Lisa Roberts
Economic strategy sub topic – AI and Digital. Sub group of Board members and officers to work up initial proposals for cross industry deployment of AI and digital could be accelerated as part of the economic strategy.	LP, PB, with support from Jai Raithatha
Economic strategy sub topic – Net Zero and Sustainability. Sub group of Board members and officers to work up initial proposals for how the net zero economy and opportunities can be accelerated through the economic strategy.	AM, with support from Lisa Roberts
Economic strategy sub topic - Place. Sub group of Board members and officers to consider initial proposals for how economic strategy can further enhance key Place plans in Suffolk, e.g. Newmarket and Ipswich.	MP
Sectors – Energy. Identify further energy sector input to Business Board.	Officer team and MP
Sectors – Energy. Briefing note to be prepared about Hydrogen economic opportunities.	Officer team – Julian Munson
Economic Strategy workshops – officer team to revert to Business Board with schedule of workshops during July.	Officer team
Business Board Comms plan – this needs to be developed and include plan to make Suffolk MPs aware of work being done by the Business Board	Officer team – Tom Gooding
Business Board Comms plan – this needs to ensure better signposting of business support offer	Officer team – Tom Gooding
Future Board topics – Business Board members to revert back with comments on proposed topics and to note if there are topics they wish to lead	All

Detailed Minutes

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed
1	Welcome and overview of session Mark Pendlington (the Chair) welcomed Board Members and the officer support team, and set out the aims of the meeting.
2	Business Board Terms of Reference Rob Hancock (RH) took the Board through the draft Terms of Reference, and the Chair asked Members for any comments on a by-exception basis. There was some discussion around the term of appointment of the Board Members, with one or two Members suggesting different approaches, such as number of meetings, or setting a six year maximum length of appointment. A suggestion of a separate term of appointment basis for the further and higher education institution representatives was also made. Officer team to revert with revised proposals covering councils and education.
3	LEP Functions Briefing Board Members received presentations giving an overview of the functions that have now transferred from the Local Enterprise Partnership (the LEP) back into the County Council, from Julian Munson, covering the Innovation Programme and Sector Boards, and Michael Gray, covering Skills.
4	Economic strategy follow-up from initial meeting and next steps The Chair asked the Board to consider where it can now focus in terms of action, where clear timelines can be given, and where a difference can be made in a short space of time. There was some discussion around what already exists around driving economic development, being mindful to avoid duplication of effort. It was agreed this will be covered in more detail at the next meetings, and that there will be some work needed to draw out what exists in the landscape, what the Board's remit is in terms of intervening and becoming involved. Members felt that as a region there is a comprehensive offer available, but clearly there are also barriers around visibility of that for businesses. Equally, for young people looking to start a career, it is not clear enough the opportunities that exist for them and the support they may receive if they choose to stay in Suffolk. How can the Board look to present this offer to the outside world? To small businesses wanting to grow their workforce in Suffolk, and young people looking to be inspired? There was a discussion about the importance of the Board's role in amplifying and defragmenting the support offer; that the Board should focus on creating additional value <i>over and above</i> that which already exists. Particularly around cross-sector, for example linking digital technology (including but not limited to AI) as a lever to connect with other sectors?

An example proposal was discussed to create a sustainability centre for the region, bringing sectors together but representing *our* region, and linking in with other initiatives already out there.

The issue of funding was discussed, given that funding of the LEP related initiatives finishes in 2025. The Board would like greater clarity on financial levers available to them. The Board also agreed the importance of making the assets and policies/programmes that exist from the LEP added to those levers the Board has. How can these be influenced by the Board going forwards, and how can they be redeployed or used differently?

Members discussed the responsibility on businesses and educational institutions to continually promote support mechanisms available.

The discussion moved on to AI, the Board noted the success of the AI festival last year, demonstrating that the appetite exists for more opportunities, knowledge and training.

There followed a discussion about support for small and medium businesses, and how difficult it can be to navigate. Better signposting via website and communications are required.

There was a brief discussion about decision making and governance, and the processes local government organisations – both district and county level – must follow for decisions to be implemented, in order to action the outcomes of the economic strategy in future. It was agreed that economic growth and better quality jobs are universally supported.

Opportunities around hydrogen energy were raised and should be included for consideration as a cross-cutting opportunity for the region.

The changing political landscape was noted, and the importance of focusing on basics and clear deliverables.

The Chair asked Members to come forward to help support ongoing work in specific topic areas between meetings, and the following was agreed:

- AI and Digital Technology – Lisa Perkins and Peter Brady
- Productivity – Oliver Paul
- Skills – Leanne Gittins
- Climate Change, Green growth and Sustainability – Andy Mellen
- Education and Business link – Nikos Savvas and Gups Jagpal
- Place – MP suggested some work around this following the initial meeting discussion (i.e. on Newmarket and the football promotion of Ipswich Town FC)
- Energy – MP to speak to Johnathan Reynolds on this
- Energy – Hydrogen – JM to produce a briefing note for the Board on this

The Board also noted the importance of considering the voluntary sector alongside businesses in the development of the strategy, and not as an add-on.

5 Plan and topics for future Boards

Board reviewed plans for future topics. Transport East was noted as an additional topic.

	<p>In addition, Board noted there will be a series of 5 economic strategy workshops over July, and that at least two Board members should attend each workshop if possible.</p> <p>Officer team to circulate dates and venues for workshops.</p>
6	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>The importance of engaging with MP's after election was raised to ensure they are aware of the work the Board is doing. This should form part of the Business Board communications plan and be led by the Chair.</p>