
Report to: Business Innovation and Growth Panel

Date: 13 September 2018

Subject: **Strength in Places Fund**

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1. Purpose of this report

To inform BIG Panel about a series of LEP supported bids into the Strength in Places Fund.

2. Information

2.1 Led by UK Research and Innovation, Strength in Places Fund is a new competitive funding scheme that takes a place-based approach to research and innovation funding, to support significant regional growth.

2.2 The high level aims of the Strength in Places Fund are:

- To support innovation-led relative regional growth by identifying and supporting areas of R&D strengths that are:
 - driving clusters of businesses across a range of sizes that have potential to innovate, or to adopt new technologies;
 - in order that those clusters will become nationally and internationally competitive.
- To enhance local collaborations involving research and innovation. Building on the underpinning regional economic impact role of universities, research institutes, Catapults and other R&D facilities (such as Innovation and Knowledge Centres - IKCs); and engaging those businesses at the forefront of delivering economic growth through innovation within the identified economic geography.

2.3 The programme will consist of two stages, with waves of funding. The first will call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from regional consortia. Those EOIs that pass this pre-qualifying stage with strongest alignment to the call criteria will receive up to £50,000 seedcorn funding to develop full stage proposals. For

the second stage, those EOIs supported with seedcorn funding will bid for full funding of between £10 million and, exceptionally, £50 million. In this first wave of funding, UKRI expects to fund between four and eight bids.

2.4 UKRI expect that projects will include and be supported by local leadership organisations including LEPs, Combined Authorities, enterprise bodies and similar economic development agencies.

2.5 Whilst no formal letters of support are required at EoI stage, a number of applicants have requested these to show alignment with strategic priorities. LEP Board considered each of the seven proposals set out below and has been minded to support each of them.

- Medtech - Led by Leeds University and building on the Leeds City Region Science and Innovation Audit, this proposal will set out the City Region's ambition to grow and strengthen the existing medtech cluster (as identified through the audit).
- Transformation legacy industries - Led by Huddersfield University and building on existing clusters around West Yorkshire, the proposal will focus around the legacy textiles industry and opportunities to grow the sector through tech improvements.
- Biotech - Led by the bio renewables centre in York, the application will be focused upon building the bioeconomy across the Leeds City Region, YNYER and Humber LEP areas. The project will establish a series of business-embedded capabilities and connect these with the region's world class research and development base to significantly accelerate the translation of fundamental research findings into commercial opportunities.
- Hydrogen - The Welding Institute (TWI) is leading on a Strength in Places Funding bid around hydrogen energy with Tees Valley LEP. Leeds University is collaborating with TWI towards a 'hydrogen valley' bid concept that includes the City Region to create a hydrogen centre and 'cluster'.
- Glass Futures - The aim of the project is to strengthen and align the existing research and commercial platform required to improve productivity in the glass sector as well as to reduce carbon emissions with the ambition to both learn from and share best practice within other industries. This initiative will create a globally unique pool of expertise in glass technology across the Northern Powerhouse.
- Clean Growth Investment Accelerator - This project will develop an innovative financing platform to unlock large-scale investments in clean, inclusive growth within the Leeds City Region.
- Delivering value from chemistry and materials across the Northern Powerhouse region – the project will establish an integrated science and technology innovation network (a 'knowledge-based growth hub') to maximise the economic impact of the high added value chemicals industry.

2.3 The outcome of the EoI stage is expected in early October with successful projects receiving up to £50,000 to work towards full proposals over the next six months

3. Financial Implications

3.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5. Staffing Implications

5.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

6. External Consultees

6.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

7. Recommendations

7.1 That BIG Panel note the contents of the report and welcomes further investment into the City Region's innovation assets to help drive future growth.

8. Background Documents

8.1 None

9. Appendices

9.1 None